ART SONGS OF WILLIAM GRANT STILL

by

Juliet Gilchrist

Submitted to the faculty of the
Jacobs School of Music in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree,
Doctor of Music
Indiana University
May 2020

Accepted by the faculty of the
Indiana University Jacobs School of Music,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Music

Doctoral Committee

_____
Luke Gillespie, Research Director

_____
Mary Ann Hart, Chair

_____
Patricia Havranek

_____
Marietta Simpson

January 27, 2020

To my mom and dad, who have given me everything: teaching me about music, how to serve others, and, most importantly, eternal principles. Thank you for always being there.

Table of Contents

List of Examples

List of Figures

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

The turn of the 20th century marked a shift in the art music of the United States. New styles, forms, and techniques were emerging, and innovative composers such as Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Samuel Barber, William Grant Still, and George Gershwin were beginning to incorporate the styles and techniques of African-American music traditions. William Grant Still holds a unique and distinctive position as one of the few classical composers of this time who was of African-American heritage.

Still's contemporary and colleague Howard Hanson, states it this way.

> William Grant Still came on the American scene at a time when the new music of America was being born. Into the melting pot of the new America, the America of the upcoming 20th century, came this new composer bringing with him the rich heritage of a race which in the past had had only slight opportunity to make its contribution to the music of America. William Grant Still brought to music a new voice, a voice filled with lovely melodies, gorgeous harmonies, insidious rhythms, and dazzling colors. But it was new music deeply rooted in the great traditions of the past.[1]

Still lived in New York City during the 1920s and his professional beginnings were in bands and dance halls. He was an extremely successful popular and commercial music composer and arranger. However, his early music education was strictly classical. He grew up learning to play the violin and listening to opera and orchestral works. It was only as he grew older that he ventured into what he saw as the music of his people and worked to learn the styles and techniques of blues and jazz.

Still was active in the Harlem Renaissance movement while living in New York. This association profoundly affected and influenced his life and musical style. He worked

---

[1] Beverly Soll, *I Dream a World* (The University of Arkansas Press, 2005), 3.

to further the ideas and ideals of the movement. He eventually turned from his commercial pursuits because of this and returned to his first love, western classical music. He always considered himself, first and foremost, a classical composer, and fought for this distinction.

Still's advocacy for, and strict adherence to classical forms had much to do with his race. He was an African American classical composer in a sea of white classical composers. Social opinion expected him to compose popular and commercial music. He wanted to be known for his classical works. He pushed back against the expectations and strictures placed on him and maintained his integrity as an artist and composer. He eventually became one of the few African-American classical composers of the time to break through racial boundaries and have some success.

Still promoted the ideas of the Harlem Renaissance by fusing traits from his African-American musical heritage, spirituals, jazz, and blues, with European classical forms. He and the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance believed this would elevate and make accessible the music of his race. He believed this would improve race relations and thus improve the lives of African Americans.

Still was not the only composer to use this type of fusion. Gershwin's *An American in Paris* is an example of incorporating jazz into a classical form. Milhaud and Copland also incorporated such elements into their works with success. It is ironic that these composers received such high recognition and Still did not.

Still never fully achieved status or recognition in the predominantly white world of classical composers. He did become a bridge between the two worlds to some extent. He was the first African American to have an opera produced by the New York City

Opera and the first to conduct a major American symphony orchestra. He was the first to have a symphony (his 1st Symphony) performed by a leading orchestra and the first to have an opera performed by a major opera company.[2]

Despite his lack of success, Still stands apart from his white contemporaries. He was not a white European composer using the techniques and styles of a subjugated and marginalized people, but an African American musician and composer highlighting styles and techniques from his own heritage.

Still incorporated these styles and techniques into his operas, symphonies, instrumental works, and art songs. This document will be a discussion of what can be referred to as his "hybrid" style and his art songs.

Still has a limited collection of art songs. However, they are extremely important. They show his breadth and growth as a composer. They are also some of the few art songs by an African American during the Harlem Renaissance. In fact his art songs serve to link him to the Harlem Renaissance by his choice of poets and text. His song cycle, *Songs of Separation*, includes Harlem Renaissance poets Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen.

The focus of this document will be three-fold. First, to discuss and examine the building blocks and influences of Still's African American heritage and what effect they had on his "hybrid" style. These influences will include family life, education, life as an African American musician in 1920s New York City, and the impact of the Harlem Renaissance.

---

[2] Elise Kuhl Kirk, *American Opera* (University of Illinois Press, 2001), 200-204.

Second, an examination will be made of a select group of Still's art songs, to discuss if and how the influences manifest themselves. This examination will include a musical analysis and discussion of the poet and poetry used.

Third, there will be a short discussion of where and how Still's songs fit into the standard repertoire today. What do they bring to the stage, both literally and figuratively, for the modern singer? How can they be used for teaching and promoting diversity in the art song repertoire?

A caveat has to be kept in mind while studying Still's art songs. He confessed a general lack of interest in the genre despite the attention garnered and appreciation expressed for them. He told William Treat Upton in a letter (ca. 1925), "Frankly, this art form has never appealed to me sufficiently for me to devote much thought to it."[3]

Setting his lack of interest aside, Still's art songs represent his musical contribution as an African American to the art form. They are also beautiful, emotionally compelling. and worthy of analyzation and discussion.

My hope is to engender a greater appreciation for the art songs of William Grant Still. My goal is to showcase and promote them as songs to be performed and studied for the richness and diversity they bring to the standard repertoire we know today.

---

[3] Letter, William Grant Still to William Treat Upton, n.d., (ca. 1925), Upton Collection, LC.

Chapter 2: CHILDHOOD INFLUENCES AND UPBRINGING

Still's mother, father, stepfather, and grandmother feature prominently in his literary writings and each contributed, in their own way, to his musical development.

Still's Mother

William Grant Still was born in Woodville, Mississippi on May 11, 1895. His father, William Sr., passed away four months after his birth. His mother, Carrie, decided to move them to Little Rock, Arkansas, to live with her mother, Ann Fambro. Carrie's sister and brother-in-law lived with Ann and young William grew up surrounded by family.

Still was raised in a middle class background and his life in Little Rock was more privileged than other children in the South, either black or white. His neighborhood was racially mixed and his friends were both white and black.[1] Because of this he did not experience the full repercussions and effects of racial prejudice and segregation.

Both his parents were educators and after his father's death, Carrie was able to support herself and her son. Because of this background, Still had access to education, books, and music lessons. He later recalled, "I grew up in an atmosphere of literary clubs, lectures, music recitals, stage shows, Red Seal operatic recordings, lots of homework, and violin lessons."[2]

Early in his life Still's mother made the effort to instill in him the ethics of hard work, dedication, self-discipline, sacrifice, and a sense of responsibility to advance the

---

[1] *The William Grant Still Reader: Essays on American Music*, Ed. John Michael Spencer (Durham, NC: Fall 1992), 245.
[2] Catherine Parsons Smith, comp., *A Study in Contradictions* (Berklay, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 33.

rights and freedoms of African Americans. She set the example for her son and strove to live by these ethics herself. She believed in public service, hard work and activism. For example, when there was no library available to African Americans in Little Rock she assisted in raising money to purchase books and establish one. She worked for most of her life and was secretary for the NAACP when it was established in Little Rock.

Carrie Still was devoted to education and learning, and held that African Americans would eventually overcome racial prejudice and boundaries through dedication to school and academics. She believed there were no racial boundaries in academic learning and forcefully guided her son in this direction. He describes her efforts this way.

> My mother had high aims for me, and she started working towards them, i.e. molding my method of thought at a very early age. I had to read the books she chose---and I am grateful to her now for it. She constantly impressed me with the thought that I should achieve something worthwhile in life. She sought to aid me to reach the state of mind that leaves one unhappy when he has failed to put forth his best efforts…she sought at all times to give me every advantage that she possibly could…[3]

Still attended school where his mother was a teacher. He was in a few of her classes where he studied Chaucer, Shakespeare, and other poetry and literature. He described her dedication to his education, "I had to be high school valedictorian because my mother made up her mind that I must be, and she made me study."[4]

---

[3] *The William Grant Still Reader: Essays on American Music*, Ed. John Michael Spencer (Durham, NC: Fall 1992), 9.
[4] Catherine Parsons Smith, *American Composers: William Grant Still* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 8.

This legacy of hard work, commitment to education, and molding of character by his mother left a lasting impression on Still. She implanted in him the idea, hope, and motivation to overcome racial prejudice and segregation. She managed to impart to him an enduring drive and fervor for what he wanted to accomplish in his life and music. It was these qualities and drive which served him well as he strove to maintain his own artistic integrity.

Still's Grandmother

Still's maternal grandmother Ann Fambro had, perhaps, the earliest and most far reaching and lasting impact on his musical life. He was extremely fond of and very attached to her. She was a former slave and he spoke of how his first memories of music were of her singing spirituals in their kitchen when he was a young boy, "During my early years, my maternal grandmother also lived with us, and it was she who sang Spirituals and Cristian hymns all day long as she worked. 'Little David, Play on Yo' Harp' was her favorite."[5]

Hearing these songs early in his life introduced Still to sounds and subjects of spirituals and hymns. He developed a fondness and love of traditional African American music because of his grandmother.

Though Still loved spirituals, he purposely avoided arranging them earlier in his career. He believed that arranging spirituals would mark him solely as an arranger of

---

[5] *The William Grant Still Reader: Essays on American Music*, Ed. John Michael Spencer (Durham, NC: Fall 1992), 248.

African American music. He did not want to be categorized in this way. Verna Arvey, Still's wife, speaks of this decision.

> …most Negro composers had won fame purely as arrangers of Spirituals and not on creative efforts, and because a great many people harbored the delusion that their work should stop there, Still made it a point not to arrange Spirituals (except when he was required to do so, in his commercial arranging) for many years.[6]

Still described it this way.

> …it took intelligent pioneering to get out of that rut---to show that we do admire and love our own Spirituals, yet that we are capable of interpreting other music more than 'acceptably' and that our composers can create music in the abstract for the world to enjoy.[7]

Despite these misgivings, Still composed a handful of spiritual arrangements, usually as commissions. For instance, he composed twelve spirituals for voice and piano for Ruby Berkeley Goodwin. In these arrangements, he chose to employ the rhythms and structures of the African American music tradition. He did not consider these works as part of his art song or art music cannon.

Still's Father

Still was named after his father, William Still (1871-1895). He was an African American college educated school teacher, as was his mother. He was also a talented

---

[6] Catherine Parsons Smith, comp., *A Study in Contradictions* (Berklay, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 330.
[7] *The William Grant Still Reader: Essays on American Music*, Ed. John Michael Spencer (Durham, NC: Fall 1992), 101.

musician who played the cornet. A description of Still's father is found in Catherine Parson's biography of Still.

> In the 1880 Census, their son William, the composer's father, was said to be nine years old. Like his two teenage sisters, he is listed as a farmhand, a customary designation for any black over five years of age. William became a good deal more than a farm hand, however. He learned to read and showed a good head for numbers. Musically talented, he traveled some distance to pursue cornet lessons. He also organized a band…William presently attended Alcorn A&M…graduating in 1892. He then taught bookkeeping and music at Alabama A&I…[8]

William Still Sr. passed away in 1895. William Grant Still never had any direct influence from his father, but was left a vicarious legacy of education and love of music. When asked once, "What was the source of your great talent?" He replied, "I should say my father, he was a William Grant also, was quite musical."[9]

Still's Stepfather

In 1904 Still's mother married Charles B. Shepperson, a mail clerk for the railway service in Little Rock. She was already part of the African American elite and her marriage to Shepperson solidified her position. The family was by no means wealthy but well off and very active in their community. They belonged to literary and musical groups, and had an active social life, attending and hosting gatherings of the Little Rock African American elite.

---

[8] Catherine Parsons Smith, *William Grant Still* (Urban-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 5-6.
[9] Eileen Southern, "A Birthday Offering to William Grant Still", *The Black Perspective in Music* 3, no. 2 (May, 1995): 165.

Shepperson had a good ear and appreciation for music even though he was not a musician himself. He had an extensive collection of Victor Red Seal phonograph records that he often played. He encouraged William and introduced him too good music and art. It was through him and his records that Still heard his first opera. Still remembered this many years later.

> I suppose the big turning point in my life came during the summer of 1912. When I went home for spring vacation that year, I found that my step-father, Charles Shepperson, had purchased a Victrola. I was tremendously excited about that. That summer I lay on the floor day after day, all summer long, listening to recordings of operas. I even remember the make, Red Seal records. [10]

It was this introduction which introduced him to the lyricism that he felt was so important in all of his works. Still would say of his step-father, "He and I spent many pleasant and profitable moments together. He too liked music. I learned at an early age to appreciate the better sort of music through the records he would buy."[11]

Still's mother and stepfather continued to give him every opportunity and advantage they could provide. Shepperson took Still to the theater, attending many plays and musical events. It was decided he should learn to play a musical instrument. The violin was chosen and private lessons were provided.

Still's mother was appreciative of music and was a talented pianist, but she did not see a future in the profession. At the time, the lifestyle for African American musicians and composers was often associated with the seedier side of life and a lower

---

[10] Catherine Parsons Smith, comp., *A Study in Contradictions* (Berklay, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 31.
[11] Ibid., 217

class. Carrie wanted better for her son. Her aim was for him to become a doctor, so her focus was on academia. There is no record as to whether Shepperson shared her aims and goals for Still. The only recorded information available points to the fact that Still's main focus was always music and his stepfather shared with him what he could and always encouraged him to learn more.

Other Early Influences

Still's family influenced him spiritually and their religious influence surrounded and molded him. Church observance was strong in the South and this was no exception in the Still household. His mother and grandmother were devout Christians and passed their beliefs on to him. His grandmother's example of devotion to Christianity and faith in God, left a lasting impression.

> She was one of the old fashioned devout Christians. She had been a slave, although she was one of the fortunate ones who did not have to work in the fields. She had seen slaves being herded along the country roads of Georgia on the way to the slave mart. She knew and sang the old songs that voiced the slaves' belief that God would not forget them. Because of her influence I have been enabled to realize the value of things spiritual, and to love them.[12]

Still never ascribed to one religion over another. He maintained a strong belief in what he referred to as a higher power or God, but at different times followed precepts of Christianity, the Bahai faith, and even mysticism. Both he and his second wife visited psychics and attended séances. This devotion and spiritual upbringing left him with ties to the past and these ties manifest in his music and style. He claimed his intention as a

---

[12] Catherine Parsons Smith, comp., *A Study in Contradictions* (Berklay, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 216.

composer was to uplift and unite not only the African American race but the human race. It can be said that this goal was his spiritual aim, and music, his religion to reach that goal.

Still's familial influences were the early building blocks of his beliefs and even his musical style. These influences remained with him all his life. They can be observed in his music, from his grandmother's spirituals to his stepfather's love of classical music. But these influences were just the beginning. Future mentors, teachers, critics, life experiences and colleagues would further guide, direct, and influence him and his musical style and goals.

Chapter 3: STILL, HANDY, AND THE BLUES

Still left Little Rock and the security of his family in 1911 and enrolled at Wilberforce College, staying there until 1914.[1] He worked to expand his musical education at Wilberforce. He taught himself to play multiple instruments, most notably the oboe.

Still was sent to Wilberforce by his mother to study science with the idea of becoming a doctor, but he had other ideas. He wanted to pursue music. Though he was supposed to be studying science, most of his energies were taken up with his extra-curricular musical pursuits. He claimed this discontent led to a less than exemplary college career at Wilberforce.

> Upon returning home after my first year of college I begged my mother to send me to Oberlin. But she had mapped out a career for me. I was to finish Wilberforce and then go to Oxford. That did not interest me. I wanted to study music. And so I wasted time in college, just barely making my grades; always in trouble for playing pranks; spending most of my time studying music, attempting to write and playing the violin.[2]

Still joined the student band and eventually became the leader. He began teaching himself arranging when he was unable to find or finance sheet music. As an arranger it became necessary for him to learn all the instruments in the band. He borrowed instruments, bought an oboe with money allotted for textbooks, and taught himself to

---

[1] Eileen Southern, "A Birthday Offering to William Grant Still", *The Black Perspective in Music* 3, no. 2 (May, 1995): 167.
[2] William Grant Still, "Personal Notes," in *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions,* ed. Catherine Parsons Smith (Berkley and Los Angeles California: University of California Press, 2000), 217.

play. “I would borrow instruments from the band’s supply and teach myself the basics until I learned what kind of things each instrument could do.”[3]

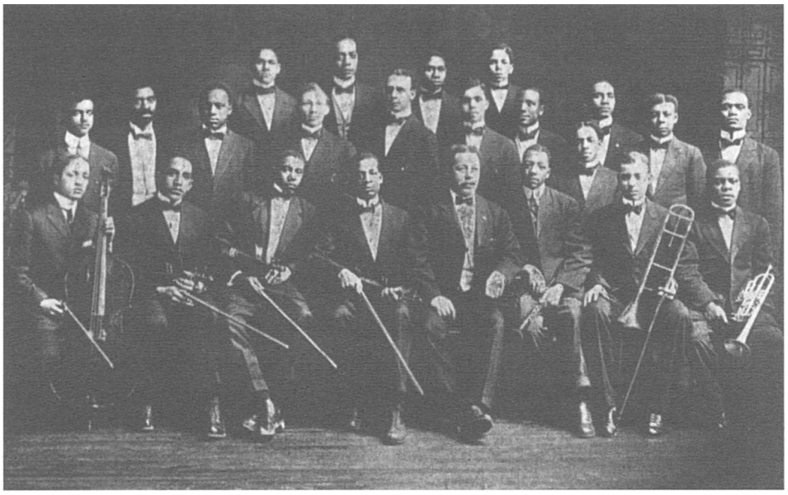


Figure 1 “Still is seated at the far left, holding his cello, in this 1914 yearbook photo of the Wilberforce Glee Club.”[4]

Wilberforce did not have a music department or much interest in musical studies so Still had to find his own venues and ways to create a musical education for himself. This dogged perseverance and determination would stand him in good stead throughout his career.

> Still managed to get a considerable practical musical education at Wilberforce in spite of its unpromising musical stance…Like Haydn at Esterháza, he was forced to be original. He learned various instruments, he had practice in arranging for various ensembles; he found inspiration and encouragement as he went along; he made some useful contacts that helped him in the lean periods to follow.[5]

---

[3] Eileen Southern, “A Birthday Offering to William Grant Still”, *The Black Perspective in Music,* 3, no. 2 (May, 1995): 167.
[4] Catherine Parsons Smith, “William Grant Still in Ohio”, *American Music,* Vol 2, No 2 (Summer, 2004): 210.
[5] Ibid*.,* 216-217.

Still finally had enough and left Wilberforce in 1914. He was able to pursue his musical aspirations and moved to Columbus, Ohio where he got a job with an orchestra playing cello. It was this job that marked the shift from the study of medicine and his mother's expectations, to becoming a full-time musician. He never returned to graduate from Wilberforce.

The orchestra in Columbus did not play jazz or blues. Instead they played the popular standards of the day, catering to a middle class, more highbrow clientele. They also regularly played for the Athletic Club. Still was also involved in playing for some Vaudeville shows at this time. He took most any music job he could find.

In the summer of 1916 Still's musical world and education expanded dramatically, when he landed a job with W.C. Handy's band, traveling through the southern United States. Handy is referred to as the "Father of the Blues" and some of the earliest examples of blues songs can be attributed to him.

This was the first time Still was fully exposed to and immersed in the blues and early jazz. Still's middle class upbringing had limited his exposure thus far. The blues were considered low class and racy by both the black and white communities of the early twentieth-century. Still's mother and stepfather would never have allowed that type of music to be played in their home. They certainly wouldn't have taken a young William to a venue where that type of music was performed. Blues was considered the music of the back streets and brothels.

> I didn't come in contact much with Negro music until I had become of age and had entered professional work. I had to go out and learn it…I realized that the American Negro had made an unrecognized contribution of great value to American music, particularly…in the…blues…[6]

Still began arranging for Handy during that summer, working on such songs as "St. Louis Blues" and "Memphis Blues."

> …I made arrangements for Handy. I made the first band arrangement of the "Beale Street Blues," for instance. And I was probably the first one to make a band arrangement of "St. Louis Blues." I learned a great deal about blues that summer.[7]

Still was inspired by what he saw as the beauty, depth, and worth of the blues. He felt and understood the pathos that the blues portrayed.

> Of course the blues were looked down upon, people looked over their noses at them, and they were considered to be connected with the brothels. But in the South, where I had gone around and listened to them at their source, I felt that there was something more in them than that. I felt that they represented the yearning of a people who were reaching out for something they had been denied…There is something pathetic in the blues, something you hope to get some day, and it looks like you're not going to get it, but yet you haven't given up…[8]

Still came to understand the structure and techniques of the blues while working with Handy. This understanding and education influenced his future compositions. His unique early musical education, straddling both the classical and jazz vernaculars, eventually led him to his hybrid style and his prominence as a musician and composer

---

[6] Catherine Parsons Smith, "William Grant Still in Ohio", *American Music,* Vol 2, No 2 (Summer, 2004): 29.
[7] "Negro Serious Music," interview with Still by R. Donald Brown, California State University-Fullerton, Oral History Program, Nov. 13, 1967, and Dec. 4, 1967, 29.
[8] Ibid, 29.

during the Harlem Renaissance. “I felt that hope and sorrow in the blues, and I wanted to use that idiom, I wanted to dignify it.”[9]

Working with Handy that summer allowed Still to learn and become familiar with the blues style and techniques. This foundation and education contributed greatly to his later efforts of mixing genres later on during the Harlem Renaissance.

Still returned to Ohio after the summer with Handy’s orchestra. In 1917 he received a small inheritance from his father which allowed him to take classes at Oberlin. He studied there, on and off, for the next year. He never made the move to being a full time music student. He was too busy with his music career and tuition was too expensive. He was able to maintain his part-time studies and work until he enlisted in the Navy at the end of World War One in 1918.

Still rambled around after the war, moving from a shipyard job in New Jersey, to Kentucky, and eventually back to Columbus, Ohio. Here he almost starved and was down to his last dollar before finding work again in an orchestra. It was then that he was able to save money and return to Oberlin for more studies. [10]

Still never graduated from Oberlin. In all, his musical studies never amounted to more than part of a term here and there. School was expensive and he always found more work to further his career rather than stay in school. Eventually, the lure of New York and the Harlem Renaissance pulled him away for good.

---

[9] “Negro Serious Music,” interview with Still by R. Donald Brown, California State University-Fullerton, Oral History Program, Nov. 13, 1967, and Dec. 4, 1967, 29.
[10] William Grant Still, “Personal Notes”, in *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions,* ed. Catherine Parsons Smith (Berkley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2000), 218.

Still moved to New York in 1919. W.C. Handy had opened a music publishing company, *The Pace Handy Publishing Company,* and Still wrote to him about a job. Handy hired him and this move and association changed his life forever. They were friends and remained friends throughout their lives. They also maintained a working relationship via correspondence, sending music back and forth for the other to read through and critique. Most of the correspondence between them still exists and contains discussions about projects and work. Their letters also contain warm expressions and inquiries about each other's families.

Despite a haphazard and sometimes sketchy musical education, Still had acquired much of what would make him so successful in New York. From classical styles and forms, to arranging, spirituals and knowledge of the blues and jazz, Still was set up to participate in the Harlem Renaissance and the classical music world and make his mark as a musician.

CHAPTER 4: STILL, NEW YORK, AND THE MODERNISTS

Still was a dual citizen in many ways in the musical world of 1920s New York. He was a performer and arranger of popular music while working on a career as an art music composer. He was also a proponent of the Harlem Renaissance while participating in the predominantly white Modernist movement happening in the classical music world. Much of this duality centered on his race. "…like most artistic figures in Harlem, he was forced to straddle two distinct yet intersecting worlds, one black and the other white."[1]

Still worked on many shows and with many musicians and producers, both African American and white. He contributed to the Harlem Renaissance and took part in the classical musical world of 1920s and 30s United States. Men such as Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, and Edgard Varèse became his contemporaries, friends, mentors, and colleagues. These relationships had a far reaching effect on Still and his work. They were invaluable and many lasted a lifetime.

Still came to New York to work in Handy's publishing house, but this didn't last. The publishing house closed in 1921 and Still took a job at the Black Swan Phonograph Company. Two instances occurred at this time which greatly influenced the direction of his life and career.

First, Still landed a job as an oboist in the pit orchestra for the all-black musical *Shuffle Along* (1921). The show ran for over a year and provided Still with steady work, steady income, and opportunities for arranging. Most importantly he met Don Vorhees and other promoters through the contacts he made with the show.

---

[1] Carol J. Oja, "New Music and the New Negro: The Background of William Grant Still's Afro-American Symphony," *Black Music Research Journal* 12, no. 1 (Autumn, 1992): 146.

Second, while working at the Black Swan Phonograph Company Still saw a letter from Edgard Varèse advertising a scholarship for a young black musician to study with him.[2] Still answered the letter and got the scholarship. He ended up studying with Varèse from 1923-1925[3], and remained lifelong friends with him.

These opportunities combined with Still's association with the Harlem Renaissance shaped his early career. He embraced the opportunities and influences which came with the Modernist/Harlem Renaissance duality and its effects which pushed him to learn and develop his own compositional voice and style.

Still's work in the orchestra for *Shuffle Along* led to more arranging and composition work. The show's official arranger, Will Vodrey, had more work than he could deal with and passed the extra work on to Still.

> Three months after the Pace and Handy Music company dissolved, Still landed a job as oboist in the pit orchestra for the new all-black musical *Shuffle Along,* whose principal arranger was old Broadway hand Will Vodery, already arranging for the Ziegfeld Follies and later the first African American arranger to work in Hollywood, Vodery…turned out to be especially important to Still. Vodery, who had more work than he could handle, gave his surplus to Still.[4]

Still gained more than arranging opportunities from this association. Vodrey eventually introduced Still to Don Vorhees. This introduction was one of the most important of Still's early years in New York. "Vorhees, was...one of the several white bandleaders who eventually gave him substantial opportunities."[5]

---

[2] Carol J. Oja, "New Music and the New Negro: The Background of William Grant Still's Afro-American Symphony," *Black Music Research Journal* 12, no. 1 (Autumn, 1992), 150.
[3] Ibid*,* 111.
[4] Catherine Parsons Smith, *American Composers: William Grant Still* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 26-28.
[5] *Ibid*, 26-28.

Eventually the Black Swan Publishing Company closed and although Still quit working with *Shuffle Along,* he was not short of work. He continued to play and arrange for shows throughout New York, such as *Dixie to Broadway* (1924). He even directed a show at the night club Plantation for a while. He worked with Leroy Smith for six months until he got offered a job with Earl Carroll in 1926. Vorhees was Carroll's music director and had suggested Still for the work.

Still's relationship with Vorhees led to one of the great catalysts of his life. In 1926 Vorhees offered him a job as arranger at $100 a week. This was a large salary at the time and Still's most important professional opportunity to date.

> Still was playing with LeRoy Smith in Atlantic City in the summer of 1926 when he got a cable from conductor Don Vorhees: 'Put In Your Notice Immediately So That You Will Be Back Here No Later Than The Twenty Sixth Sooner If Possible Let Me Know If OK.' Vorhees started paying him $100 a week as an arranger, a good salary at the time. At that point Still was able to give up playing in public and devote himself to making music by putting notes on paper, sometimes in the form of arrangements done for regular salary, and sometimes in the form of his own compositions. [6]

The job with Vorhees enabled Still to put aside playing in bands and orchestras and fully devote himself to arranging and composing. Still's first love was still the classical music and forms of his youth, and this job gave him the opportunity to focus on these compositions. He also felt he could contribute to the ideals of the Harlem Renaissance more through his classical music efforts. Still's professional relationship with Vorhees continued in this capacity for three years.

---

[6] Smith, *American Composers: William Grant Still*, 37.

Still's association with Vorhees led to another important opportunity. Still was hired by the white band leader Paul Whiteman because of Vorhees. Whiteman hired Still to come west to California and join his band in 1929. He also arranged a personal contract for Still to do arrangements for his radio show *Old Gold Hour* while out there. He was also contracted to make a movie with the band, *The King of Jazz* and stayed in California for a year while until it was completed.[7] Still was enamored of the newness and freshness of California and eventually returned to live there in 1934.

Still returned to New York and was out of work for about fourteen months. In 1931 he was hired as an arranger for Willard Robison's Deep River Orchestra. Although he began as arranger, he eventually was chosen to conduct. This was important because the orchestra was made up of all white players. It was a success and highly praised. Still made a huge step in pushing against racial boundaries of the time.[8]

It is important to mention that even though Still embraced and utilized the duality he was living, he kept his classical and popular pursuits separate. He maintained this stance for most of his life. This differentiation began during his early years in New York.

His greatest interest was in classical music and he wanted to be known as a classical composer. This was difficult for crossover musicians, composers, and arrangers at that time who composed in both the classical and popular genres. It was especially difficult for African American composers and Still was very mindful of it.

---

[7] Catherine Parsons Smith, *American Composers: William Grant Still* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 41-42.
[8] William Grant Still, "Personal Notes", from *A Study in Contradictions*, by Catherine Parsons Smith (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 220

> In his later years Still was quiet about his work as an arranger and orchestrator on Broadway and in radio, in favor of his concert career. Critical opinion about 'serious' music was based on a kind of social Darwinism, shared by a substantial portion of the concert audience. Popular music…was 'merely' instinctive, lacking emotional depth or (especially) an intellectual dimension; Composers of popular songs were thought to be even less likely to produce anything suitable to the concert hall…[9]

Still's idea of separating his classical and popular works went deeper than musical esthetics. His differentiation between being a classical composer and a popular one also evolved from the racial discrimination he experienced and his beliefs and advocacy work with the Harlem Renaissance. He believed, "…in serious music, a Negro can be a pioneer and thus contribute to racial advancement and to inter-racial understanding…"[10]

Still fought stereotypes about his music and composing throughout his career. Despite his successes he often received mediocre responses from critics because of his race. Gayle Murchison, a Still scholar, describes it this way. "…his music often drew ambivalent critical responses that were permeated with stereotypically race based expectations."[11]

Because of such criticism, Still's concern led him to compose and arrange popular songs under the pseudonym Willy S. Grant during his early years in New York. He used the pseudonym to keep his popular works separate from what he considered his more serious and classical work.

---

[9] Catherine Parsons Smith, *American Composers: William Grant Still* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 39.
[10] William Grant Still, "Can Music Make a Career?" *Negro Digest 7,* (December 1948): 82.
[11] Gayle Murchison, "'Harlem Renaissance Man' Revisited", from *A Study in Contradictions*, by Catherine Parsons Smith (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 182.

Still believed he could promote his race through classical music and worked to break down racial barriers and to improve what he described as race relations with his music and compositions. His hybrid style was born of this idea.

> He sought to break down race-based limitations on the mixing of African American and European techniques, forms, and styles through the use of blues-based harmonic progressions, melodic turns, forms, and sometimes rhythms…[12]

Still may have kept his popular music endeavors separate from his art music, but he firmly supported the use of "African American vernacular music".[13] However, he did believe that African American composers should not be relegated solely to that type of composition.

> In effect, he was a Talented Tenth Race leader, demonstrating that it was possible for a black man to be active as a composer of art music and encouraging young, aspiring black musicians. Still believed that art music was a new field open to African Americans. That black art music was welcomed in the concert hall was, for Still, proof of America's basically "democratic spirit" and emblematic of an improvement in race relations.[14]

Still maintained an optimism, at least publicly, despite racial prejudice and negative reactions to his music during this period. He always spoke in positive terms and believed that change was possible. This optimism served him well as he navigated the 1920s New York music scene.

---

[12] Gayle Murchison, "'Harlem Renaissance Man' Revisited", from *A Study in Contradictions*, by Catherine Parsons Smith (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 182
[13] Catherine Parsons Smith, *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions*, (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 57.
[14] Ibid., 57.

Still, Varése, and the Modernists

From Schoenberg's rejection of tonality to Stravinsky's move away from traditional meters, the modernist movement in classical music meant revolution, change, and innovation. Still arrived in New York at the height of the movement, and his association with Varèse lobbed him smack dab in the middle of it.

> Facing a music establishment solidly rooted in the performance of European masterworks, they banded together to form performing societies, magazines, and publishing firms to promote their work. Most prominent among these efforts were the International Composers' Guild, established by Varèse and Carlos Salzedo in 1921…[15]

The classical music world of early 1900s New York was primarily a white one and Still was one of the few African American composers who was succeeding at the time, albeit with some restrictions and prejudice. His letter to Varèse and subsequent experience studying with him opened doors for Still which might never have been opened otherwise. Because of Varèse he gained support from a community that was considered avant garde. For a while he worked to fit that mold and was encouraged and spurred on by Varèse and the modernists.

> While Still by no means held the power or the prominence of the modernists movement's leaders…he joined a group of promising new-comers to New York, and his music appeared on programs of the International Composers' Guild and the American Composers' Concerts…He was also a founding member of the Pan American Association and had works performed by George Barrère's Little Symphony Orchestra…Thus, Still took part in the most important new music activities of the day…[16]

---

[15] Carol J. Oja, "New Music and the New Negro: The Background of William Grant Still's Afro-American Symphony," *Black Music Research Journal* 12, no. 1 (Autumn, 1992), 110.
[16] Carol J. Oja, "New Music and the New Negro: The Background of William Grant Still's Afro-American Symphony," *Black Music Research Journal* 12, no. 1 (Autumn, 1992), 110-111.

Varèse was living in Greenwich Village at the beginning of the 1920s and was actively promoting performances of works by 20th-century composers. He founded the International Composers' Guild in 1921 and the Pan-American Association of Composers in 1926[17], which created venues for performances of works by young modernist composers. Still was a member of both of these and other organizations.

Varèse became a great supporter of Still and his music. He was certainly instrumental in getting his concert music performed. Still described Varèse's mentoring style and his foray into the modernist style.

> [Varèse] took for himself, and encouraged in others, absolute freedom in composing. Inevitably, while studying with him, I began to think as he did and to compose music which was performed; music which was applauded by the avant-garde, such as were found in the International Composers' Guild.[18]

Still's wife, Verna Arvey, credits Varèse with making crucial connections for him in New York and introducing him to major conductors of his day, including Leopold Stokowski, Eugene Goossens, and Georges Barrère.[19]

Still began adopting the new modernist style while studying with Varèse, experimenting with atonality, disjointed rhythms, and dissonance. He describes his music from this period as ultra-modern. There are few examples of Still's "modern style." Most have been lost. Two vocal works, *Levee Land* (1926) and "Breath of a Rose" survive and show hints of Still's foray into this style.

---

[17] "Edgard Varèse/American Composer". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edgard-Varese#ref159180, accessed 3/27/2019.
[18] William Grant Still, "Horizons Unlimited", in *William Grant Still and the Fusion of Cultures in American Music,* edited by R.B. Hass. (New York: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 113-123.
[19] Ibid., 112.

Still did not adhere to the modernist style for long, despite being part of that group. At the time he was more interested in furthering what he referred to as "the racial idiom" than the modernist one. His work and ties to the Harlem Renaissance, in particular, strengthened this this decision.

At first he worked to combine jazz and blues techniques with the modern style that was being fostered in him by Varèse. These pieces are what kept him within the modernist community and continued to be performed in the new music organizations to which he belonged.[20] But the modernist style and techniques did not fit the goals of the Harlem Renaissance, to promote his race, to push back against racial prejudice, and improve "race relations".

> Unlike his white modernist colleagues, Still had nothing to gain and everything to lose by using the exclusionary, modernist languages such as serialism or atonality. His personal interest lay with the integration into the larger society and the larger musical language—in becoming, as he said, 'another American voice' whose work confounded both race and class-based distinctions.[21]

Still eventually found the combination of modernism with jazz and the blues did not work. Musically and personally he was not satisfied with modernism and eventually turned from it.

---

[20] Carol J. Oja, "New Music and the New Negro: The Background of William Grant Still's Afro-American Symphony," *Black Music Research Journal* 12, no. 1 (Autumn, 1992), 155

[21] Gayle Murchison, "'Harlem Renaissance Man' Revisited", from *A Study in Contradictions*, by Catherine Parsons Smith (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 182.

> Experiments proved to me that the Negroid idiom tends to lose its identity when subjected to such treatment. I wanted to employ an idiom that was unmistakenly Negroid because I wished to do my part in demonstrating to the world that the American Negro is capable of making a valuable contribution in the field of symphonic music, and I wanted to write a Negroid idiom, music that would help build more harmonious race relations.[22]

Still felt the modernist style to be limiting for him musically as well. He found the lack of melody and tonality, along with the cacophony of rhythms, hemmed him in and did not portray what he was attempting to accomplish. He had a romanticized and spiritual view of what he believed music should accomplish and provide for the listener. In the end, he spoke critically of the modern aesthetic.

> It must, of course, be admitted that there are composers whose works are products of the objective or conscious mind. These are they whose creative efforts are governed by mathematical formulae; or those who impose upon themselves the limitations of specially devised scales, etc., or those who efforts are directed toward the production of sound rather than the production of music. Creations of this sort, being objective, have no aesthetic value. Man's higher, or spiritual self, fails to respond even slightly to them, for they are void of life and cannot speak the language of the soul.[23]

Still believed melody should be the main focus of any musical work and this can be seen throughout his musical cannon. He believed the melody and lyrical line could touch the listener and reach people's souls.

---

[22] Catherine Parsons Smith, *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions*, (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 49.
[23] *The William Grant Still Reader: Essays on American Music*, Ed. John Michael Spencer, Durham, NC: Fall 1992), 81.

> …melody should always stand out prominently. All else that accompanies it should be subordinate to it, and constant caution must be exercised lest the melody be obscured by having too much going against it.[24]

He also said:

> One of the results of being able to tap the fount of inspiration is a melodic gift, and I cannot emphasize too much the importance of this gift, which seems to be so woefully lacking in so many contemporary composers. The so-called 'creators' who lack the gift of melody always direct their message to the intellect rather than the heart, or soul---and this explains the dry, boring music they turn out.[25]

Though Still turned away from the modernist aesthetic, he and Varèse remained friends until Varèse's death in 1965. Still always spoke highly of him because of his help and support.

> The period of study with Mr. Varèse helped me wonderfully. It taught me to be independent; to break away from the barriers…I began finding myself…I liked Varèse, and I still like him. I think he is an exceptional man. He was my friend in the true sense of the word. He stood firmly for me. I shall always be indebted to him.[26]

Still may have turned away from the modernists, but there is no arguing the education and benefits he derived from being part of their circle during the 1920s. Doors were opened and he gained a solid grasp and understanding of himself as a composer and artist. His work with the modernists helped to shape him even though he walked away from the aesthetic. Still's association with the modernist movement and style left its mark on him, if not musically, by helping him realize which direction he wanted to go.

---

[24] Catherine Parsons Smith, *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions*, (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 253.
[25] Ibid, 253.
[26] William Grant Still, "Personal Notes", from *A Study in Contradictions*, by Catherine Parsons Smith (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 219.

CHAPTER 5: STILL, NEW YORK, AND THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

By the time Still arrived in New York, the catalysts which brought about the Harlem Renaissance were already in motion. A mass migration from the rural south had already begun before World War One, which eventually brought over 500,000 African Americans into the north-east United States.[1] There was also a huge shift from ruralization to urbanization after World War One which brought many to the city.

The ideas of the Harlem Renaissance began to take shape during the early 1920s. African American authors and intellectuals started promoting African American literature and arts in an effort to improve social conditions. Their aim was to improve race relations, working circumstances, and the living situations of many African Americans, not just in New York, but the entire United States. The ideals of the Harlem Renaissance became a clarion call and African American poets, novelists, playwrights, and artists flocked to the city.

The Harlem Renaissance was also referred to as the "New Negro" movement and originated and was led by a group of African American intellectuals dubbed "The Six" [2]: Jessie Redmon Faucet, American editor, poet, essayist, and novelist[3]; Charles S. Johnson, a sociologist and the first President at Fisk University[4]; Casper Holstien, a mobster and

---

[1] Kathy J. Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution,* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4.
[2] Samuel A. Floyd, ed., *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 1.
[3] Ruben Paul, "Jessie Redmon Faucet", *In American Literature-A Research and Reference Guide.* Retrieved August 28, 2013.
[4] Matthew William Dunne, "Next Steps: Charles S. Johnson and Southern Liberalism," *The Journal of Negro History* 83, no. 1 (Winter 1998), 1 & 3.

racketeer[5]; Alain Locke: writer, philosopher, educator, and patron of the arts[6]; Walter White, a journalist, novelist, essayist, and head of the NAACP from 1931-1955[7]; and James Weldon Johnson, author, educator, lawyer, diplomat, and songwriter.[8]

> These individuals thought of themselves as 'thinkers, strivers, doers, and...cultured'; they 'aspired to high culture as opposed to that of the common man…They put a high premium on the rediscovery and promotion of folk materials for the sake of documenting and celebrating the black cultural heritage and for the use of these materials as sources of inspiration and points of departure for the artistic creation.[9]

The Harlem Renaissance was foremost considered a literary movement, and works of numerous writers, including poems, plays, and novels, were produced during this time. Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, and Countee Cullen were some writers whose works represent the vision and possibilities of the movement.

Alain Locke's efforts in particular solidified and defined the Harlem Renaissance. In 1925 he compiled and edited a collection of essays, poetry, and graphic art titled *The New Negro.*[2710] This collection served as a "cultural manifesto" [11]. The Harlem Renaissance was also known as the "New Negro" movement because of this.

Locke described the "New Negro" movement as an embodiment of the progress made by African Americans since the end of slavery and Reconstruction. His use of the

---

[5] Geneviéve Fabre and Michael Feith, *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance.* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001).
[6] Lacey Gates, *Biography: Alain Leroy Locke,* Pennsylvania State University Center for the Book. Retrieved August 28, 2013. http://pabook.libraries.psu.edu/palitmap/bios/Locke__Alain_Leroy.html
[7] Tom Dyja, *Walter White: The Dilemma of Black Identity in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008), 12.
[8] Eugene Levy, *James Weldon Johnson: Black Leader, Black Voice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).
[9] *Ibid,.*
[10] Catherine Parsons Smith, *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions*, (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 40.
[11] Gayle Murchison, "Dean of Afro-American Composers" or "Harlem Renaissance Man", *William Grant Still, a Study in Contradictions,* (Berkley, California: University of California Press, 2000), 40.

term and intentions of the compilation instilled in African Americans a sense of pride in their culture and heritage.

The term "New Negro" and its concept did not begin with the Harlem Renaissance but during Post-Reconstruction in America." It originally implied advocacy for dignity for African Americans and speaking out against Jim Crow racial segregation.[12] The hopes and possibilities associated with the term were more fully realized during the Renaissance than at any time previously.

The term "Harlem Renaissance" also originated from Alain Locke. In the forward of *The New Negro,* he referred to the "New Negro" movement as a "renaissance" for African Americans. Locke called for artists, authors, and musicians to come to New York City and gather in Harlem. He singled out the neighborhood as a "cultural and social mecca".[13]

> To advance the movement, Johnson and Locke issued a call for artists to come to Harlem…The lure of success brought young artists from all parts of the country---The writers Langston Hughes and Zora Neal Hurston, the painter Aaron Douglas, and many others. Musicians came to the city in numbers, if not in response to the "call" of Johnson and Locke, to that of the city and its opportunities. Eubie Blake came from Baltimore; Duke Ellington form Washington, D.C.; Fletcher Henderson from Atlanta; other musicians came from a variety of locations. The lure was the potential for success in an exciting environment.[14]

---

[12] Henry Louis Gates, "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black," *Representations*, Vol. 24, No. 131 (Fall: 1988), 40.
[13] *Ibid.,*41.
[14] Samuel A. Floyd, ed., *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 6.

Any expression to promote and stimulate the "New Negro" was encouraged. The pervading belief and attitude was that further rights and civil liberties could be gained through an expansion of the arts.

> At bottom, the Renaissance was an effort to secure economic, social, and cultural equality with white citizens, and the arts were to be used as a means of achieving that goal. Charles S. Johnson, for example, perceived that arts as a primary area of advancement for black people…it was believed that once black artists made their mark, equality would emerge on all fronts.[15]

The concept of greater equality by the advancement in the arts could be seen in the growing acceptance and mainstreaming of African American music. The "younger generation" was continually being drawn towards the popular music of jazz and swing. Dance halls and music dives were springing up in New York and around the country and racial boundaries were beginning to blur.

Music During the Harlem Renaissance

Music of the Harlem Renaissance emphasized the characteristics and genres that developed from the African American culture; primarily spirituals, blues, and jazz. Composers and artists endeavored, both directly and indirectly, to promote African American idioms to a higher level of art or art form.

> Between 1900 and 1930, there were three groups of musicians whose works were of revolutionary significance. The members of these groups did transform, to some degree, 'primitive' black musical genres into 'higher forms'…these musicians, through their individual works, ensured that the inherited black music genres, and elements thereof, were developed into extended and more complex forms.[16]

---

[15] Samuel A. Floyd, ed., *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 2.
[16] Ibid., 6.

These innovators and musicians can be divided into the following categories. First, the "the musicians": Ford Dabney, James Reese Europe, Will Marion Cook, and William Christopher (i.e., W.C.) Handy. This was the group who was classically trained and had extensive academic background in music. For example, Ford Dabney was born into a musical family and studied theory, harmony, and composition.[17] Handy first learned about music at church. His grandfather was an Episcopalian minister and it was at his church and in his choir that he received early musical training.

The second group are "The Jazzmen."[18] This group consists of Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington. Both men were famous for their endeavors to develop big band jazz as well as promoting their orchestrations and compositions in the genre. Both studied music in their youth but were not ardent pupils as were those in "the musician" group. Ellington recalls favoring baseball over piano lessons.[19]

The third and final group are "The Pianists": James P. Johnson, Willie "The Lion" Smith, and Thomas "Fats" Waller. These are the men whose talents and skills at the piano helped to bridge the gap between ragtime and jazz. They are grouped together as practitioners of the "stride" style, a jazz piano style which developed in New York in the 1920s and 30s. These men were the composers of many tunes that became popular during the 20s and 30s. For example, Johnson was the composer of the famous tune "The Charleston." [20]

---

[17] www.grainger.de, "Ford T. Dabney", accessed November 11, 2013.
[18] Samuel A. Floyd, ed., *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 2.
[19] Duke Ellington, *Music is my Mistress* (New York: Da Capo, 1976), 10.
[20] Samuel A. Floyd, ed., *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 2.

These musicians are not an exhaustive list but their music and styles represent the musical development that was happening during the Harlem Renaissance. They contributed to their particular genre and sphere and strove to further the musical idioms of African American culture along with African American literature and poetry.

Still should and can be listed with these innovators. His hybrid style complicates fitting him into a particular category though. He fits in with both "the Musicians" and "the Jazzmen" to varying degrees. He was a trained musician, if somewhat self-taught, and furthered classical music. He was also a Jazzman, utilizing the sounds and styles of blues and jazz in his works.

Still and the Harlem Renaissance

The concept of furthering African American art, literature, and culture through music is extremely important in understanding Still's style, mainly because he was striving to achieve the same thing. The lessons of service and activism, instilled in him early on by his mother, ran deep and found direction and an outlet in the Harlem Renaissance.

Many of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance recognized Still's talent and his dedication to the movement. No one more so than Alain Locke, with whom Still had a close personal and professional relationship.

Locke took an early interest in Still's career and listed his compositions in the "Bibliography of Negro Music" in *The New Negro.* He recognized Still's importance in the movement as one of the few African American art music composers. Because of this Locke encouraged and supported Still in his musical endeavors and ideas.

Locke also brought Still's attention to many texts. He attended performances of Still's works and maintained a correspondence with him.[21] Many of Still's musical collaborations evolved because of Locke's support.

Still was a great lover of poetry. This love created a natural affinity with the poets and literary artists of the Harlem Renaissance. He met and associated with many of them at social gatherings and they eventually became colleagues, collaborators, and friends.

For instance, Still collaborated with and set the poems of Arna Bontemps and Countee Cullen. Both were well known for being proponents and authors of the Harlem Renaissance. He set the poetry of both in the form of art songs.

Still's most famous collaboration was with Langston Hughes. He set Hughes' poems and collaborated with him on his opera *Troubled Island,* based on Hughes' play *Drums of Haiti.* Still and Hughes maintained a personal and professional relationship throughout their careers.

Through his collaborations, and with Locke's help, Still rubbed shoulders with some of the greatest literary figures of the Harlem Renaissance. These musical settings and collaborations are what bind him to the Renaissance.

Post-Harlem Renaissance and Still's "Universal Idiom"

Still always retained the drive and beliefs that were instilled in him from his association with the Renaissance. He never lost his ideals and dedication to what he saw as promoting the talents and welfare of African Americans. He continued to promote his

---

[21] Gayle Murchison, "Dean of Afro-American Composers" or "Harlem Renaissance Man", *William Grant Still, a Study in Contradictions,* (Berkley, California: University of California Press, 2000), 44.

African American heritage and the concept of the "New Negro" throughout his life and career.

Still continued to use the poetry of African American authors in his art songs and operas even after he left New York. For example, his song cycle, *Songs of Separation,* was born of the ideals of the Harlem Renaissance. All the poets were African American, but not all had a direct connection with the Renaissance.

Virginia Brasier, Paul Henry, Philippe Thoby Marcelin, and Paul Laurence Dunbar are some of the other African American poets that he set. In doing this he continued the idea of elevating the poetry and literature of African Americans through music and song.

Still believed in the ideals of unity, friendship, humanism, and a brotherhood of man. His composing efforts evolved to reflect these ideals and goals. He described his style as being divided into three periods. [22]

> The first spans the early to the mid-twenties prior to his studies with avant-garde composer Edgard Varèse…this period ends in 1925. During the second, 1925-1932, Still adopted what he described as the 'racial idiom.' The third began in 1932 when he turned from the specifically racial idiom toward the 'universal idiom.'[23]

Still had embraced the ideals of the Harlem Renaissance and now wanted to expand on these principles. He wanted to move beyond the idea of a "racial idiom". This would, he believed, supersede race and embrace all humankind.

---

[22] Judith Ann Still, *William Grant Still and the Fusion of Cultures in America* (Flagstaff, Arizona: Master Player Library, 1995), 8-10.
[23] Catherine Parsons Smith, comp., *A Study in Contradictions* (Berklay, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 48.

> Still himself eventually chose to move beyond a racial idiom, turning to what he described as the "universal idiom" in the 1930s. In his writings and works that specifically address issues of race relations and racism, one can hear the philosophies of DuBois and Locke and their ideas on how art could be redemptive and serve as one tool to bring about progress in race relations and racial understanding. Although committed to using his efforts in the field of art music to serve this purpose of promoting better race relations, Still saw his work as not just serving America and African Americans. He approached his compositions with great spirituality and believed that his music should serve all of humanity and promote universal brotherhood.[24]

Still moved to California in 1934 and took up residence in Los Angeles. The move was a permanent one and was a gamble for him. It set him apart from the social and political events going on in the east, particularly the Harlem Renaissance and the effects and changes happening with regards to the modernist movement in music. He wanted the freedom to compose the way he wanted and not to be influenced by what was going on in New York. Los Angeles, with its distance, provided the perfect place for him to settle and achieve this.

Still's "universal idiom" is eclectic and he utilized whatever method or technique he believed appropriate to the piece he was working on. His eventual goal was to create music that was appealing, and portray what he wished to say as an artist, a man, and a composer.

---

[24] Gayle Murchison, "Dean of the Afro-American Composers or Harlem Renaissance Man: The New Negro and the Musical Poetics of William Grant Still", *The Arkansas Quarterly,* Vol. 53, No. 1 (Spring, 1994), 73.

> Today the music I write stems in some degree from all of my experiences, but it is what *I* would like to write, not what others have insisted that I write. Some people have been kind enough to say that I have developed a distinctly personal style of musical expression. I hope they are right, and if they are, I am sure it has come from keeping an open mind, meanwhile making an effort to select what is valuable and to reject what is unimportant, in my estimation.[25]

Still did not allow much to dissuade him from what he believed to be his path in life. His determination, strength, and integrity, both as a musician and as a man, served him well in his endeavors. He never lost sight of his goals and who he was and wanted to be.

Still could have been a modernist composer. He had the support of Varése and the modernists. He could have had security and even modest wealth with his successes in commercial and popular music. He could have been a larger proponent of Harlem Renaissance. He had the support of Locke and others.

Still moved away from comfort and stability for his beliefs and ideals. He turned away from modernism. He left behind commercial music. He expanded past the ideals of the Harlem Renaissance and chose to move towards his "Universal Idiom". He turned away from all these expectations and to remain true to his own personal principles and philosophies.

---

[25] Judith Ann Still, edit., *William Grant Still and the Fusion of American Music* (Flagstaff, Ariz.:The Master-Player Library, 1995), 55-56.

CHAPTER 6: STILL'S SONGS

Still's body of art songs includes three song cycles, a collection of twelve spirituals, another collection of rhythmic spirituals, and over ten other songs for solo voice and piano. Still also arranged many of the songs for either string quartet or orchestral accompaniment.

Still did not have a great love for the art song genre but was very fond of poetry[1] and it can be surmised that this contributed to his song composition endeavors. Still composed songs throughout his life and had no set agenda or plan as to how or why he composed them. Many were taken on as commissions.

Still's songs will be discussed in regards to musical analysis, poetry and text, and where they fall into his three self-proclaimed creative periods: his modernist style, his "racial" idiom, and his "Universal Idiom".

Possible questions to be asked can include, but are not limited to: Does the song contain jazz or blues influences? Does the song follow African American folk-music structures mentioned in previous chapters? Is the text or poetry by a poet or author from the Harlem Renaissance or one who followed the ideals of the "New Negro" movement? In what way, if any, does the poetry influence Still's composition of the song? How does the song or cycle stand against Still's other works and how does it compare with the standard art songs of the day? These analyses will hopefully provide a greater understanding of Still's songs and where they fit into his compositional lexicon.

---

[1] Judith Ann Still, *William Grant Still and the Fusion of Cultures in American Music* (Flagstaff, AZ: The Master-Player Library, 1995), 58.

"Breath of a Rose"

"The Breath of a Rose" (1928) is one of Still's earliest songs. It is written for solo voice and piano. The song contains characteristics of his racial idiom and echoes of his modern style.

The poem is by Langston Hughes, connecting the song firmly to the Harlem Renaissance. It is written in four stanzas and the basic structure of the song follows the form of the poetry.

Love is like dew
On lilacs at dawn:
Comes the swift sum
And the dew is gone.

Love is like star-light
In the sky at morn:
Star-light that dies
When day is born.

Love is like perfume
In the heart of a rose:
The flower withers,
The perfume goes-

Love is no more
Than the breath of a rose.[2]

Dissonance permeates the song and the tonal center is ambiguous. The key signature has two flats, but does not represent the key of the work. The notes of the first measure are Bb, D, F, Ab, C, F#. The chord could be a major-minor nine chord except for the F#. The dissonance between the F and F# creates tension from the beginning.

---

[2] Richard Walters, Ernst Bacon, Amy Beach, John Alden Carpenter, Ernest Charles, John Duke, Charles Tomlinson Griffes, et al. *Romantic American Art Songs: 50 Songs by 14 Composers, for High Voice and Piano* (New York, NY: G. Schirmer, 1990).

The scent or breath of a rose symbolizes the uncertainty and intangibility of love. Still represents this in the music, by creating a feeling of variability which permeates the song and represents a mercurial portrayal of love that Hughes speaks of in the poem. Stills uses irregular phrase lengths portray this. The singer should be aware of this and the different moods and inflections Still establishes.

The structure of the song is a loose ABba form, with a four bar introduction which establishes a repeating dissonance of F#/F. The first two bars of the introduction return before the a section. Section A and a are ten measures long while sections B and b are eight measures long. The varying 8 and 10 bar phrases add an unsettled and disjointed feeling to the piece.

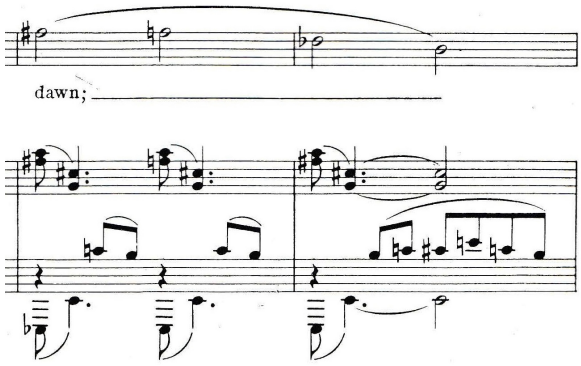
The phrases can be broken down further into various lengths. Section A is a five-bar phrase followed by a one-bar phrase with a fermata. This is then completed by a four-bar phrase. The five-bar phrase draws out the words and is melodic while the one-bar phrase is declamatory, punctuated, and unmelodic. Still continues the idea of the disjointed phrase by using a fermata at the end. The four-bar phrase resolves on the word "gone" and then is drawn out, as if whatever is "going" is fading away with the phrase itself.

The B sections are more stable than the A sections and can be broken down into four bar units which the follow the poetry. These consistent four bar phrases create the sense of stability lacking in the A sections. The standard phrasing in the B sections also serves to show contrast and highlight the instability of the A sections.

Still also uses harmonic structure to portray the emotion of the poetry. The dissonance in the opening chords sets a harsh and unstable tone that continues throughout

the work. The opening chord, from the bottom up, is B^b, F, A^b, C, and F#, and creates tension with the use of the F against the $F^{\#.}$ Still also uses tri-tones, augmented fifths and sixths throughout the piece. These all add to the feel of instability and lack of resolution

The $F/F^{\#}$ becomes central to the piece. Still uses it in harmonic form, such as in the beginning. He then uses it to great effect in melodic form, such as the descending line on the word "dawn," in the opening phrase. "Love is like dew on the lilacs at dawn…."[28] The word "dawn" becomes a plaintive wail, as if you already know that love is lost.



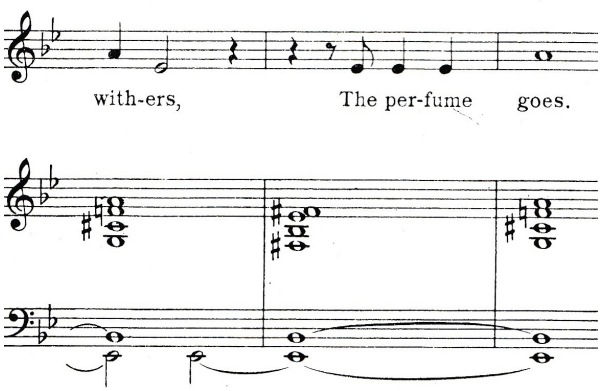
Example 1: "Breath of a Rose" mm 8-9[3]

Still's use of the F# in the A section does not continue in the B section of the song. When the F# disappears in the B section there is a feeling of relief or rest from the tension that is created in the A section. The tension is not completely gone, but with the absence of the F# there is a respite. The lack of tension is not gone for long as it builds again at the beginning of the b section. The dynamic marking is forte, which is new. The piano is playing block augmented and extended tertian chords. The impression is defiant and declamatory.

---

[28] Richard Walters, Ernst Bacon, Amy Beach, John Alden Carpenter, Ernest Charles, John Duke, Charles Tomlinson Griffes, et al. *Romantic American Art Songs: 50 Songs by 14 Composers, for High Voice and Piano* (New York, NY: G. Schirmer, 1990).
[3] *Ibid.*

The strength of love does not stay though. It doesn't matter how much strength is added to the statement, "Love is like perfume, in the heart of a rose." The next phrase of the poem, "…the flower withers, the perfume goes," cannot be denied and returns on a mournful tri-tone in the vocal line.

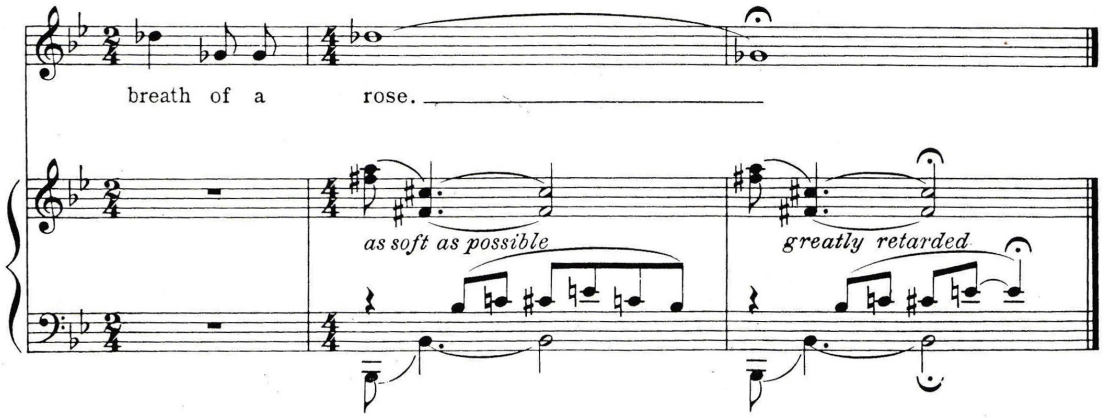


Example 2: "Breath of a Rose" mm 29-30[4]

The a section concludes the song with the poetry, "Love is no more than the breath of a rose." Still than repeats the poetry, "…no more, than the breath of a rose."

The vocal line in the repeat contains only M2 and M5. There is finality in the voice part and a hollow openness in the open fifths. The instability is gone.

[4] Richard Walters, Ernst Bacon, Amy Beach, John Alden Carpenter, Ernest Charles, John Duke, Charles Tomlinson Griffes, et al. *Romantic American Art Songs: 50 Songs by 14 Composers, for High Voice and Piano* (New York, NY: G. Schirmer, 1990).



Example 3: "Breath of a Rose" mm 40-42[5]

The piano part continues the theme of instability, but like a background whisper being hinted at. It is the vocal line which truly portrays the resignation and finality of the poetry. All hope is gone. Love is mercurial. Love is fleeting. Love is intangible, like the breath and scent of a rose.

Songs of Separation

Songs of Separation (1949) is Still's most well-known song cycle. It certainly contains his most famous songs, particularly "A Black Pierrot" on a poem by Langston Hughes. The cycle has strong ties to the Harlem Renaissance with all the poems being by African American poets: Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Philippe Thoby Marcelin, Arna Bontemp, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes. Three of the five, Bontemp, Cullen, and Hughes, had direct ties to the Harlem Renaissance and Still. Dunbar was a late 19th-early 20th-century author and poet and Marcelin was a 20th-century Haitian novelist and poet.

---

[5] Richard Walters, Ernst Bacon, Amy Beach, John Alden Carpenter, Ernest Charles, John Duke, Charles Tomlinson Griffes, et al. *Romantic American Art Songs: 50 Songs by 14 Composers, for High Voice and Piano* (New York, NY: G. Schirmer, 1990).

Still composed the cycle to promote African American poetry and was one of the highlights of his advocacy efforts for the Harlem Renaissance. Gail Murchison, a leading Still scholar, states that, "These vocal works solidify Still's connection to the Harlem Renaissance."[6]

Still uses subtle variations and techniques of jazz and blues throughout the work. The cycle represents his hybrid style or "racial idiom" in many ways. Orin Moe, a Still scholar, points out four specific points which support the cycle's ties to jazz and the blues.

> One, the work as a whole is organized in as a series of choruses (the use of this term is deliberate) on an initial group of ideas, a procedure similar to jazz. Two, the musical rhythm is often syncopated against the poetic rhythm, particularly in the metrically conservative poems. Again, this suggests jazz. Three, the harmonic language is compatible with blues or jazz: seventh and ninth chords; chords of the added second; alternation between major and minor thirds, etc. And four, the cycle as a whole is strongly pointed towards "A Black Pierrot", a poem obviously in blues style and a song which uses elements of Jazz. [7]

The poetry in the cycle has no definitive or overt references to the African American experience except in the final song, "The Black Pierrot." However, the theme of "separation" appears throughout the cycle and is a reference used by many African American authors. "Separation" is a reoccurring theme in African American poetry and, in particular, the blues.[8]

---

[6] Gail Murchison, "Current Research Twelve Years After the William Grant Still Centennial," *Black Music Research Journal* 25, no. ½ (Spring-Fall, 2005), 129.
[7] Orin Moe, "William Grant Still: Songs of Separation" *Black Music Research Journal* 1*,* (1980), 19.
[8] Orin Moe, "Black Music and Musical Analysis: William Grant Still's 'Songs of Separation' as a Point of Departure," *Black Music Research Journal* 10*,* no.2 (Spring, 1990), 89.

"Idolatry" and "A Black Pierrot" begin and end the cycle and serve as the bookends of the work. They are the most complex of the songs and have opposing imagery. "Idolatry" uses the cold metaphor of hard stone to represent the death of a love which contrasts with the warmth and very human aspect of the Pierrot and the loss of love.

Poème" the second song in the cycle and "If you should go", the fourth, have similar imagery and are love poems. "Poème" the second song in the cycle and "If you should go", the fourth, have similar imagery and are love poems. Both are ambiguous and mercurial love stories. Both are ambiguous and mercurial love stories. These songs create contrast to the drama of the stories of lost love

"Parted" is the third song in the cycle and has been described as the "fulcrum" of the work.[9] It is the least emotional of the songs, both in the text as well as the musical setting. The structure of "Parted" is simple and direct which plays against the tension and drama of the rest of the work. There is a hollowness and directness to the song which is a relief from the drama of death, love, and exuberant life. "Parted" is the center of calm in the cycle. It is the eye of the storm. This starkness and calmness serves to highlight the other songs.

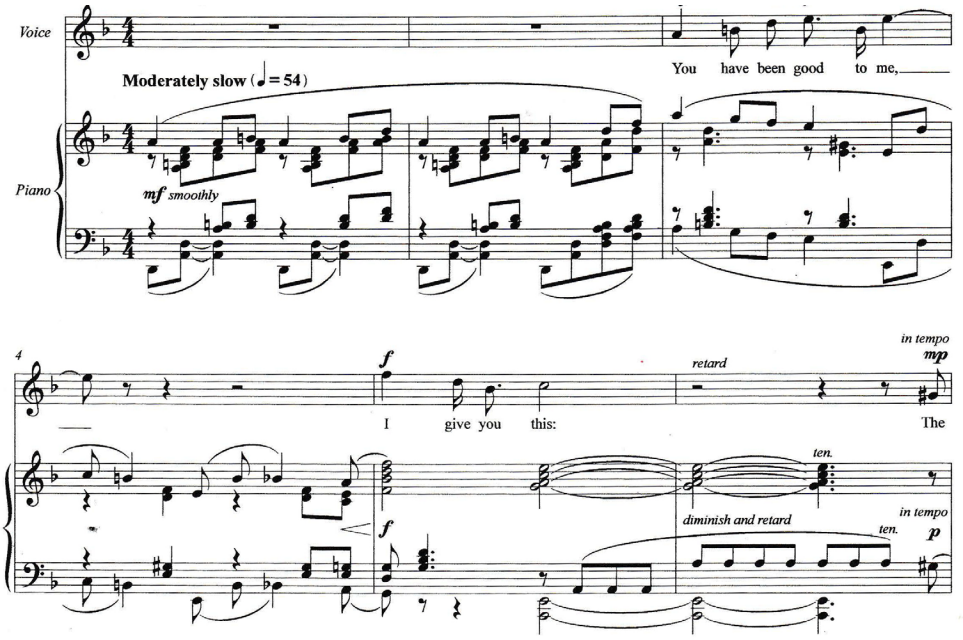
[9] Orin Moe, "William Grant Still: Songs of Separation" *Black Music Research Journal* 1, (1980), 19.

The Individual Songs

"Idolatry"

"Idolatry", poem by Arna Bontemps, is the first song in the set and is the most subtle of all the poems. There is irony in this because it is the most complex of all the settings. The song is divided into three sections, with each section more dramatic than the last. The growing drama leads to a culminating moment and high point at the end.

The thematic material in "Idolatry" is presented in the first section, m.1-6, which Still uses throughout the piece. This opening material is also the first line of the poem itself.



Example 4: "Idolatry" mm 1-8[10]

The opening ostinato in mm 1-2, which becomes the central motive, is built on a d-minor chord with an added sixth. There are also parallel octaves in the outer voices that

[10] William Grant Still, *Songs of Separation* (New York, NY: Leeds Music Corporation, c.1949).

will recur and a sustained chord in m. 5-6 that return as thematic material. Though varied in the other songs, this thematic material becomes the building block for the entire cycle.

The first cadence happens in m.5-6 and highlights the introduction of the speaker in the poem. Measure 7 directly begins the second section of the piece which begins the chorus and is the second line of the poem. The thematic material begins to vary and evolve and Still breaks into these variations quickly, creating a sense of rushed instability which highlights the poem. The ostinato returns in measures 11-13 and now, in m. 12-14, where the variations are occurring, emphasizes a dramatic and jarring shift that will happen in the next section of the poem and song.

In the final section the thematic material is not as closely tied to the original. The added sixth in the harmony is still there, but the ostinato is missing at this point. The octaves are vaguely represented and the top line of the accompaniment part more closely resembles the second section than the introductory material of the first.

Still uses jazz techniques in this song in the text setting. It has been noted that he syncopates the text against the melodic line[11]. This displacement of the text rhythm can be compared to "a jazz soloist displacing themselves against the structured beat of the piece."[12]

Still's habit of over stylizing appears in this song with multiple *ritards* and "*in tempos*". Despite the atonality and dissonance, there is a lushness which he achieves by his choice of chords and driving rhythms. The piece is highly theatrical with the bells spoken of in the poetry sounding in the chords of the piano. Still is a very visual

---

[11] Orin Moe, "William Grant Still: Songs of Separation" *Black Music Research Journal* 1, (1980): 22.
[12] *Ibid:* 22.

composer, whether he is setting a mood or scene with the chords or by his use of text painting.

"Idolatry" is the most modern sounding song in the cycle. The vocal line is set in a declamatory style. Still uses dissonance and tonal instability to great effect. This dissonance and atonality add to the complexity of the work and helps to set up the contrast that will come with the second song "Poème".

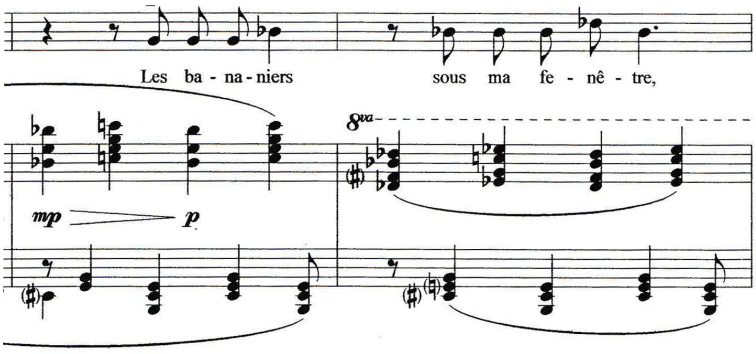
"Poème"

The second song in the cycle, "Poème", is a beautiful love poem in French by Phillipe Thoby Marcelin. Still sets this song in contrast to the jarring angst and drama of the first poem.

It was not dawn yet
But I had got up
Rubbing my eyes
The world around me slept.
The banana trees under my window
Shivered in the moonlight's calm
Then I took my head in my hands
And thought of you.[13]

Again, he uses block chords and harmonies to portray the mood and feel of the piece.

[13] William Grant Still, *Songs of Separation* (New York, NY: Leeds Music Corporation, c.1949).



Example 5: "Poéme" mm 8-9[14]

The text is set syllabically like the first song. Still continues the use of motives and techniques that he used in "Idolatry." The added sixth reappears in the vocal line as do the octaves between the outer voices. The use of ostinato, though subdued, is apparent, especially in the left hand.

The syncopation between the poetry and rhythm of "Idolatry" does not appear in "Poème" and references to jazz or blues are almost nonexistent. The song is more representative of French popular song.

"Parted"

"Parted" is the third song in the cycle. It sits as the fulcrum of the work. It is simple, witty, and short. It a serves as an emotional respite. There is very little depth to the work and the poem is not connected or related to the others in the cycle. There is simplicity in the song that counterbalances the others in the cycle. It is the emotional eye of a storm, before the continued journey in the rest of the cycle. It is not calm, but bouncy with a 6/8 meter, which provides contrast and relief.

---

[14] William Grant Still, *Songs of Separation* (New York, NY: Leeds Music Corporation, c.1949).

"Parted" has many facets which add to its simplicity. The song has an almost folk like quality which adds to the idea of calm. Numerous rests create a simple open sound. There are four measure phrases, and the vocal line is prominent throughout.

Ironically however, there is a greater amount of dissonance in this song than the previous two. This dissonance alludes to the fact that the emotion or storm is still there on the periphery. Yes, there is calm in this work, but the drama is not gone. It is more like the eye of a storm and the drama and emotion will return in the final two songs.

"Parted" does not allude to any form of jazz or blues. The use of folk style could be construed as such, but Still uses this technique more for effect than anything else. It is an artless song based on a simple clever poem which serves as the central axis and rest point of for the cycle.

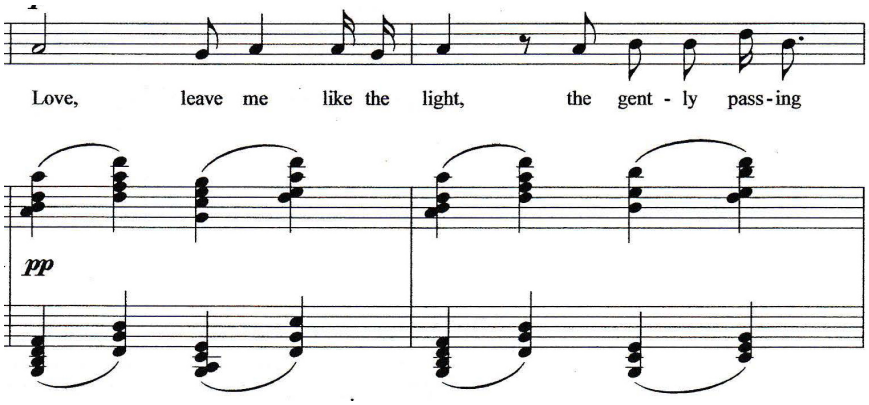
"If You Should Go"

"If You Should Go" is the next song in the cycle. The text is a love poem by Countee Cullen, a poet and author well known during the Harlem Renaissance. It is the counterpart of "Poème" and mirrors the soft feel of a love song. It is also tied to "Idolatry". Motivic structures and themes from the first song return, tying the song to the cycle. The ostinato returns, as well as repetitive chord progressions. The octaves do not return.

The return of the syncopation between poetic and musical lines is highlighted in this song and alludes strongly to "Idolatry." Still's use of syncopation in the vocal line is one of the few allusions to jazz and blues techniques in this song. The ostinato in the

piano creates a dreamlike quality which infuses the soft love lyrics with an otherworldly feel.

"If You Should Go" is reminiscent of American popular song, as "Poème" is reminiscent of French popular song. The simple speech like rhythm in the voice part, harmonic structure, and four bar phrasing support this.



Example 5: "If You Should Go" mm 2-3[15]

"A Black Pierrot"

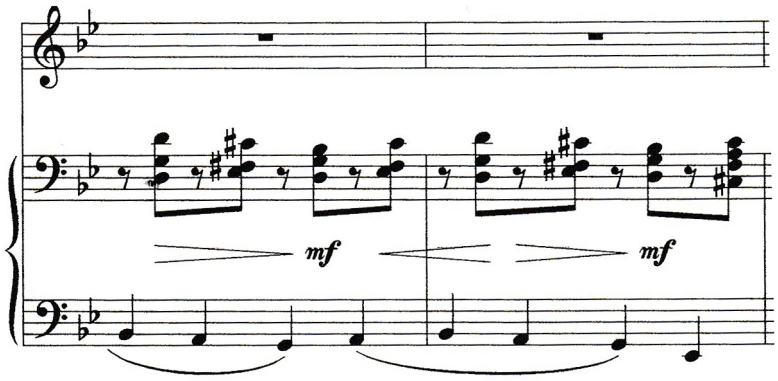
"A Black Pierrot", the final song in the cycle, is partnered with "Idolatry". It is on a poem by Langston Hughes and speaks of unrequited love. It has been described as "the only poem in the cycle that could be related to the black experience..." and that "…musically as well, it establishes a close relationship to the black experience."[16]

The song contains more blues and jazz techniques than the other songs in the cycle and has the strongest references to the Harlem Renaissance by its structure and subject matter. It is the culmination of the cycle, both emotionally and dramatically.

---

[15] William Grant Still, *Songs of Separation* (New York, NY: Leeds Music Corporation, c.1949).
[16] Orin Moe, "William Grant Still: Songs of Separation" *Black Music Research Journal* 1, (1980), 32.

The motives from "Idolatry", reappear and the jazz techniques and structures hinted at in some of the other songs are very clear in this one. For example there is call and response in measures 1-6 and then 7-9. There is also a walking bass example in measures 17-18 with syncopated chords in the piano. There is a contrapuntal feel in the accompaniment that could suggest a jazz combo.



Example 6: "A Black Pierrot" mm 17-18[17]

The cycle itself is brilliant in its conception and execution. It is a cycle built on variation. Still incorporates western classical music, American popular song, French popular song, folk song, jazz, and blues to create a brilliantly rich cycle.

"Grief"

The song "Grief" (1953) is based on a short poem written by Leroy V. Brandt. Still describes how the poem came about and how he ended up setting it to music.

[17] William Grant Still, *Songs of Separation* (New York, NY: Leeds Music Corporation, c.1949).

Brant was accompanying Theodore Simmons, a music student, to a local cemetery, where he saw a commonly seen statue of an angel with his head down, enclosed in his arms, weeping. The statue inspired Brant who wrote the lyrics as a poem, which he sent to Still, who set it to music. The piece was premiered by Theodire Simmons (tenor), who sang it at a concert, accompanied by his wife Barbara on the piano, also a student of Brant. Still was in attendance.[18]

The statue is located in the Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington D.C..

Figure 2: Grief Monument, Augustus St. Gaudens [Rock Creek Cemetery, Washington D.C.] National Photo Company Collection, Prints and Photograph Division.[19]

Singers should note that two recent corrections were made to the song by the Still family. First, Still intended the title of the song to be "Weeping Angel".[20] Second there was a discrepancy in the final note of the vocal line. The note has been published over fifty years as B-natural. The note was originally composed as an A-natural. Judith Still,

[18] "From the unpublished letters of William Grant Still to Theodore Simmons," Song of America, Accessed December 4, 2019. https://songofamerica.net/song/grief-1/
[19] Grief Monument, Library of Congress website, Accessed December 4, 2019. https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200186214/
[20] "Grief," Works for Voice(s) and Piano OR Voice(s) and Ensemble, Grant Still Music, http://www.williamgrantstillmusic.com/WorksforVoiceorVoicesandPiano.htm#Grief.

William Grant Still's daughter, knew the note was wrong and worked with the Library of Congress to correct the mistake.[21]

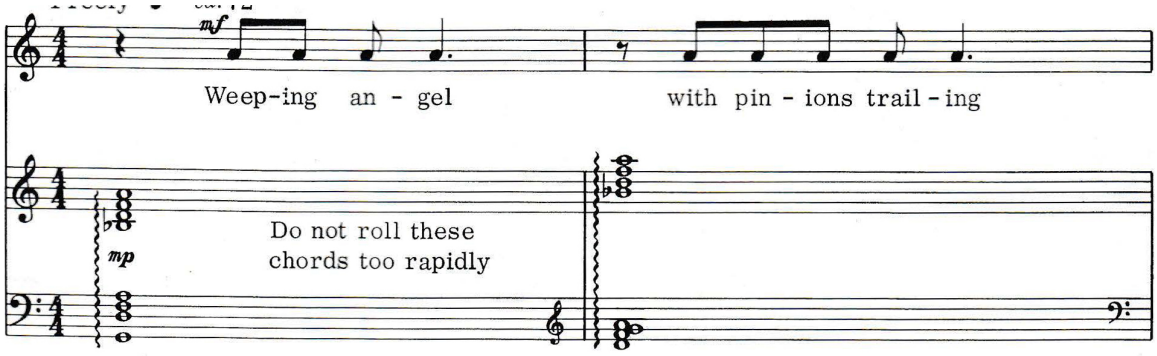
Weeping angel
with pinions trailing
And head bowed low in your hands
Mourning angel
with heartstrings wailing
for one who in death's hall stands.

Mourning angel
Silence your wailing
And raise your head from our hands
Weeping angel
On your pinions trailing
The white dove,
Promise,
Stands![22]

The poem is central to the framework of the song. It is repeated twice in its entirety and can be interpreted as either Aa or AB form. The genius of the piece is the repeated A5 note in the vocal line. The melody, such as it is, is structured around this note. The opening phrase, "Weeping angel with pinions trailing and head bowed low in your hands," is all sung on A, except for the word "low" which goes up to C5.

[21] "Copyright Deposit Sets Record Straight on Noted 20th-Century Song," Library of Congress Blog, April 11, 2014, https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2014/04/copyright-deposit-sets-record--straight-on-noted-20th-century-song/.

[22] Richard Walters, Ernst Bacon, Amy Beach, John Alden Carpenter, Ernest Charles, John Duke, Charles Tomlinson Griffes, et al. *Romantic American Art Songs: 50 Songs by 14 Composers, for High Voice and Piano* (New York, NY: G. Schirmer, 1990).



Example 7: "Weeping Angel" mm 1-2[23]

Still uses chord structure and harmonies to establish the mood during the first section of the song. The tone of the piece comes from the color of the chords. The succession of these chords and the feel and mood of each specific chord is what gives the song its character and eventually, its sense of motion as well.

The accompaniment in measures 1-17 is stark, consisting of block chords. He has marked some as rolled. Most all of them are extended tertian chords with blues notes in them. The opening chord is a mm9, which moves to an inverted mm9 and an then an augmented 11th.

The minor-minor chords create a sense of loss in their sound, which coincides with the opening words of the poem. However, in m5 of the song, Still uses a Mm7 chord that sounds more hopeful. This Mm only lasts for two beats as it quickly moves to a mm7 chord in the second half of the measure. But the idea of hope is established, almost as a foreshadowing of what will come later, in the B section of the song, measures 18-28.

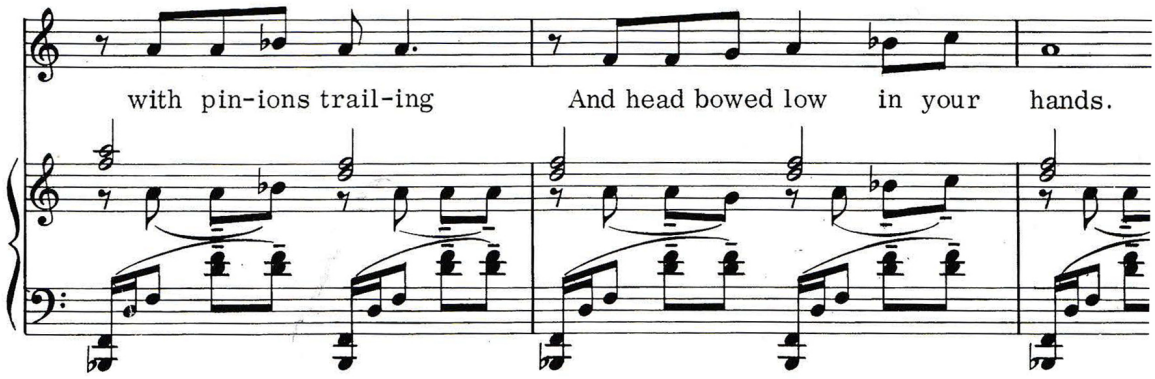
---

[23] Richard Walters, Ernst Bacon, Amy Beach, John Alden Carpenter, Ernest Charles, John Duke, Charles Tomlinson Griffes, et al. *Romantic American Art Songs: 50 Songs by 14 Composers, for High Voice and Piano* (New York, NY: G. Schirmer, 1990).

The vocal line would be static if not for the rolling of the chords. Still gives the instructions to "not roll the chords too fast". This helps soften the severity that is created by the lack of motion in the vocal line and the severity of the block chords.

The text is very speech like in the first section. The marking, at the beginning of the piece is "freely". This pertains to the A section of the piece and gives the singer the license to almost speak the first few measures of the song, on pitch, to bring across the poetry.

In the second section of the song, beginning on measure 18, the tempo slows and the piano accompaniment comes alive with fuller chords and rhythmic movement. The beginning section is centered around a mm9 chord based on G. Whereas, in the second section, Still uses the mm9 chords but the tonal center travels down a M6 to base the new chords on Bb. In fact, the first four measures of the second section is all mm9 based on Bb. This change is the fruition of the hopefulness that was foreshadowed previously in the Mm chords earlier in the piece.



Example 8: "Weeping Angel" mm 18-19[24]

[24] Richard Walters, Ernst Bacon, Amy Beach, John Alden Carpenter, Ernest Charles, John Duke, Charles Tomlinson Griffes, et al. *Romantic American Art Songs: 50 Songs by 14 Composers, for High Voice and Piano* (New York, NY: G. Schirmer, 1990).

The succession of chords, once again, completely sets the mood in the second half of the song. Still travels between mm9, and mm7, based on the Dorian mode. The vocal line moves more and there is a sense of hope and even pleading as the vocal line, almost in defiance of the stagnancy of death, soars and moves.

Though Still expands the vocal line, the sense of loss and death in section A is never lost in the second section as it is picked up in the piano accompaniment. This foreshadows the return to the rolled chords and vocal line that sings constantly the note A5. With the return to this theme it is faced that the reality of death cannot be stopped.

To fully understand this song, the performers should listen to the changing chords and timbres that Still has established. He worked to imbue the poetry with hope and peace, instead of the grief and sadness of death. This is what he was trying to portray and achieve. He was trying to leave the singer and audience with the feeling of hope, and that death is not the end.

"Citadel"

"Citadel" (1956) exhibits Still's use of lush impressionistic harmonies and romanticism. The song is through composed and can be divided into four loose sections, ABB'C with a tag in the final four measures.

Still walks a fine line between European classical style, jazz, and blues techniques, with extended tertian harmonies and syncopated rhythms. The harmonies hint at the blues, but also represent late romantic and impressionist styles.

The text is by poet Virginia Brasier. Though little is known about her today, Brasier contributed to such magazines as *The New Yorker* and *The Saturday Evening Post* in the 1940's and published collections of poetry in the 50's, 60's, and 70's.

There is no information available as to why he chose to set the poem or whether it was for a specific occasion or purpose. There is even some difficulty defining a date of composition. The date 1956 is the only reference that can be found on an online article on newworldrecords.org.[25] Even then, the description is only one sentence long.

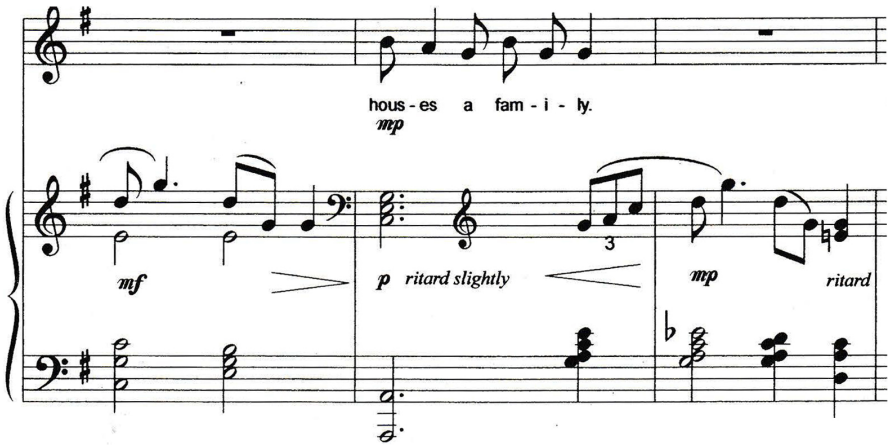
Brasier's poem speaks of the strength and power of love. Love can be perceived as insubstantial and intangible, but has the power and strength to protect a family. Love creates a Citadel that surrounds the family. Love protects the family from peril and can protect them from the world.

Love can lace leaves together
And make them proof against the world,
Or strengthen whatever insubstantial roof
Houses a family.
Sometimes, at night
All mothers waken,
And with the littlest light
And greatest quiet
Tour the room,
To see that all sleep,
Covered well, and peacefully,
To chase out dreams
And let in more fresh air.
And just be glad that each is sleeping there.
Love can lace even leaves,
And make them proof against peril,
Or strengthen whatever insubstantial roof.[26]

---

[25] "Works by William Grant Still", New World Records 80399, VIDEMUS. http://www.newworldrecords.org/liner_notes/80399.pdf, Accessed January 26, 2016.
[26] William Grant Still, "Citadel, *An Art Song Collection* (Flagstaff, AZ: The Master-Player Library, 2000).

Still uses impressionism techniques in this work to create other-worldly and dream-like qualities to great effect. This can be seen in his use of undefined harmonic resolutions and ambiguity of key, beginning and ending on a GMM^7 chord. There is a sense of instability which he plays with as well. For instance, the poetry naturally resolves in mm 9, but there is no harmonic resolution.



Example 9: "Citadel" mm 8-10[27]

Further evidence of this instability and ambiguity can be seen in the B section. The section begins with the second stanza of the poem in measure 11. The section begins with a G chord, but lacks a typical harmonic resolution leading into it. The chord directly before this in m.10 is an Amm^{11}. This ambiguity of key and harmonic resolutions continues throughout the song.

There is a hint of a typical resolution in m 18. The final notes of the measure are G's. But again, harmonically, there is a return to the Amm^9 which was also seen in m. 9. The impression of a resolution comes with the blatant use of G and the markings of

[27] William Grant Still, "Citadel", *An Art Song Collection* (Flagstaff, AZ: The Master-Player Library, 2000).

ritard, and then moving into an *a tempo* in measure 19. Still's use of harmonic ambiguity sets the mood of the piece and completes the dreamy quality he is obviously striving for.

The work is full of syncopation in the vocal line and accompaniment. In typical Still style, he uses a heavy hand with markings, with many metronomic changes and *ritards* and *a tempi* used. This starting and stopping obscures the time signature and creates a vague tempo.

Still uses many techniques to create his impressionist song. These include tonal ambiguity, sensuous harmonies, extended tertian chords, and a vague metrical pulse. All combine to create a unique art song which is very representative of his style.

From the Hearts of Women

From the Hearts of Women (1959) is a song cycle with text by Verna Arvey. The cycle contains four songs, "Little Mother", "Midtide", "Coquette", and "Bereft". These songs portray four specific women as well as four distinct situations and times in a woman's life. Still wrote the song for soprano and piano, as well as arranging it for soprano with instrumental accompaniment[28].

The cycle is representative of Still's "Universal Idiom" in that he has moved away from the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance. His wife wrote the texts and they are very personal, real, and honest. They are almost theatrical in presentation and each tells a story.

---

[28] William Grant Still: From the Hearts of Women, accessed March 4, 2015, http://www.williamgrantstill.com/William-Grant-Still-Hearts-Women/dp/B00O08Z6N4.

Still has been criticized for using his wife's texts. The works which he collaborated with her on have been criticized as not being of the same caliber as those with collaborations with the Harlem Renaissance poets. But Still relied heavily on his wife's input and valued her involvement in his works. Her poems and texts may not be of the same caliber as the Harlem Renaissance poets, but she has a unique voice and perspective, and Still apparently valued that.

Writing songs from the perspective of women is part of Still's "universal idiom". *From the Hearts of Women* branches out to include the perspective of women. He, perhaps unwittingly, advocates for women's perspective and celebrates their voice and experiences. This possibly comes from his being raised by such strong women i.e. his mother and grandmother.

Still combines the jazz techniques of syncopation and call and response in the work, combined with syllabic setting of the texts. The vocal lines are melodically narrow and sparse, adding strength and emphasis. All that he does musically enhances what the words are saying. The song cycle portrays Still's sensitivity, originality, and creativity as an art song composer. It also highlights his skill as a composer to elevate a text and tell the story of the four women portrayed.

"Little Mother"

The first song in the cycle is "Little Mother". The text portrays a little girl who speaks to her rag doll as if it is her child. Still uses extensive tempo and style markings in this song to portray the girl's speech and actions. The markings, key, and

harmonic structure support the poetry and enhance the text. This structured and highly stylized approach dominates the song and leaves very little room for interpretation.

The song begins with a four-measure introduction followed by the vocal entrance. The tempo marking for the introduction is 132 and the interpretive marking is "Playfully." This changes abruptly, with the vocal line entrance singing "baby sweetheart, baby darling." The markings here are "Moderately" and 104. It is important to mention and note these markings as they change many times.

Other markings used extensively are *a tempo* and *ritard.* The *a tempo* marking is used five times in the in the first page, going back and forth with the *ritard.* This "back and forth" between the two markings create a strict and highly stylized rubato. The only contrast is in mm 30-44, which he marks as *Freely*. Tempo and style markings are completely absent from this section.

Still's markings follow the word declamation and flow of the poetry, which portrays the attitude and actions of the child. The structured rubato, starts, and stops portray the wandering attention, mind, and ideas of a small child. There are short accompaniment interludes as well where the usage of markings is continued.

These are particularly touching moments where you do not hear the child's actions or speech being described in the poetry, but you hear and sense it in the music itself. For example, Still uses a fermata or grand pause as if the girl is distracted and time stops before she focusses back on her doll again.

The song is written in the key of B-major, with no key changes and very little variance. This mimics a simple song that a little girl might make up to sing to her doll.

Still's typical usage of extended tertian chords is minimal in this piece. It is very straightforward and simplistic in its harmonic structure. This simplicity enhances the text. Still's talent for enhanced text-setting and painting is obvious in this song.

"Midtide"

"Midtide" is about a woman who has lost her "only love." The text is very personal. The song structure follows the heavily marked and stylized pattern in "Little Mother." The singer should have no doubts as to what Still wants as a composer. Still continues his usage of *ritards* and *a tempos* to create a stylized rubato. He also provides a tempo marking at the beginning with the direction to sing the song "Pensively."

The vocal line is speech like and the melodic range is narrow. There are multiple sections where the text is sung on repeated notes. Still takes this speech-like quality a step further in mm 9-10, mm 13-14, mm 25-26, and mm 29-30, by incorporating recitative style. The use of recitative references Still's understanding and love of opera. However, this use is different from its typical use in opera, as he uses it as an affectation, not to further the story.

Each recitative section starts with the text "I can remember…." The impression is of looking inward, becoming lost in memory and thought for a few short moments. Each section is two measures long and is sung over a different chord. The first is iv, the second i, the third iv $^{4/2}$, and the last MM^{7}. These chords are significant; each enhancing the text and demonstrating Still's use of text painting.

In the second of the two-measure sections Still marks a *ritard* and then returns to the original *tempo I* in the next measure. The markings continue his stylized rubato which

mirrors the emotion of the text. The music and singer move back to reality with the return to *tempo I.*

"Midtide", like "Little Mother", only hints at Still's use of blues and jazz. There are extended tertian chords, but they harken more to the styles of Ravel, Debussy, and late romanticism.

"Coquette"

"Coquette" is the third song in the cycle. The text for "Coquette" is in the first person and is a women speaking of her love affairs and how she goes through life attracting men.

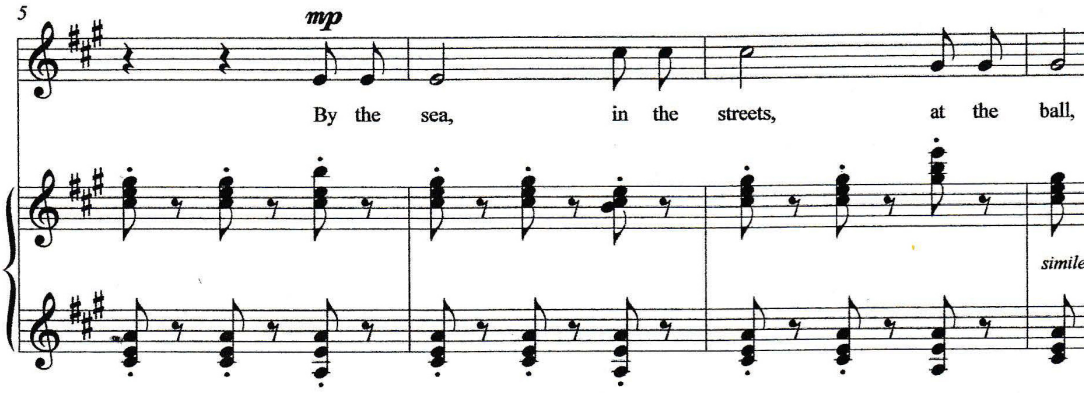
The form and structure of the song is very simple. It is only sixty-eight measures long. At one hundred and thirty two beats per measure, this leaves the song at just above a minute and a half long. The form is a simple strophic AA'. The verses are almost identical musically, with the only change made in the four last measures.

Harmonically, the song is in the key of A-major and never modulates. The harmonic progression continuously moves between I and V chords. Still uses extended tertian chords and many inversions of both the V and the I chords, but he does not vary from this.

The tempo of the piece is lively, with a marking of 132. Still gives the instruction to interpret the song as "Gaily". The idea of gaiety is implied in the rhythm and meter, which is in ¾, implying a waltz or a dance. The waltz feel is strengthened by the vocal part which begins with a pattern of two eighth notes on the third beat with a half note on

the down beat. This repeats three times in the beginning of the song. The pick-up eighth notes return throughout the song, firmly establishing a waltz feel.

The simplicity of the song is what contributes to its success. Still uses text painting throughout the song. For instance the idea of gaiety and lightness are portrayed in the waltz feel and the major key. This is also shown with the staccato chords in the accompaniment. Everything on the surface of the piece is happy and light, portraying the life of a carefree woman.



Example 10: "Coquette" mm 5-7[29]

Other text painting is evident in the work. The repetitive and one dimensional use of the I and V chords portray the shallow and hollow attitude of the coquette. The song is in ¾ time signature, but does not feel like a dance or a waltz. The piano part begins with a staccato pick up note which creates a false and unsteady downbeat. This could represent the false and unsteady attitude of the coquette as well.

Still's genius is seen in his creation of layers of text painting. He does not portray the coquette as what is typical; a woman with no cares, happily moving through life and

[29] William Grant Still, "Coquette", *From the Hearts of Women: A Song Cycle* (Flagstaff, AZ: The Master-Player Library, 2004).

men. Through the music he shows what she portrays to the world. He shows her to be shallow, false, and even trite, not what she represents to the world.

The last chord of the song serves to cement this fact. Instead of ending on the I chord, Still ends on the $I^{6/5}$. This leaves the song unsettled and with an unfinished feeling. As if there is a question at the end and that the truth has not been told in the text.

"Bereft"

"Bereft" is the final song in the cycle. It is highly dramatic and deeply emotional. The text portrays a mother who has lost her son in death. Like the other poems in the cycle it is not stellar poetry, but Ms. Arvey manages to paint a poignant scene with her words and it is this emotion and meaning that Still manages to bring to life so well.

The song in in AB form. In the first section the mother tells of sitting by her son's bedside remembering his childhood and the happy emotions that came with those memories. The key signature in this section suggests a-minor, but moves into a major key in measure seven. Still uses this simple technique of moving into a major key to portray the happiness of the moment. He then abruptly changes to f-minor in measure eleven when the text turns more dramatic and she expresses her pain and anguish at his death. The sections follow the structure of the text.

The song sings like an aria reminiscent of Puccini. The text setting is declamatory, with the meter changing multiple times. It does not change to match the text, but changes to enhance the instability or mercurial mood of the mother. The accompaniment is gorgeous and the emotion meant to be portrayed is evocative and

compelling, but there is little room for personal interpretation. For instance the marking in the last two measures is "With a catch in the voice/ritard steadily to the end".

From the Hearts of Women does not follow any pattern, such as from young to old. Instead it is set up as small vignettes with views into women's lives. "Bereft" and "Midtide" are particularly honest in the subject matter of depression and loss. "Little Mother" and "Coquette" are less so.

"Coquette" could be portrayed in a negative light for the subject matter, but it is not. Instead it is a direct, honest, and open portrayal of a rather shallow woman. "Little Mother" is a lovely insight into the life of a little girl repeating words and instruction that she has heard from her own parents.

Conclusions

Still's art songs, like his other works, fit into his three creative periods. "Breath of a Rose" represents his modernist style, *Songs of Separation* his "racial idiom", and *From the Hearts of Women* his "universal idiom". Even though he was not as prolific in the genre, his art songs show his evolution as a composer and are representative of his style as a classical composer.

Still's art songs are evidence that he used jazz and blues harmonies and techniques throughout his composing career. Even though he moved away from what he considered his racial idiom, he did not move away from the sounds and techniques he learned as a young man.

Still's art songs are relevant for today's recital singer and should be programmed. They are comparatively unknown and underperformed in modern art song recitals. They

are different, beautiful, challenging, and unique. They can add a distinctive quality to a recital with the influences of jazz and blues. They are also very expressive and can stretch and improve the singer's interpretive and acting abilities.

Still's art songs are some of the few in which both poet and composer have direct ties to the Harlem Renaissance. The songs represent a subgenre in 20th-century music that has not been fully tapped. This makes them stand out and unlike other art songs.

Still's art songs represent two groups which, in the history of the United States classical music, have been marginalized and overlooked: African Americans and women. The songs are very pertinent with current women's movement and continued civil and equal rights advocacy.

Still's style and compositional output are significant in the history of classical music. His status as an African American classical composer was unique during a time when racial prejudice limited the efforts of many of his colleagues. He deliberately sought to elevate the musical genres of his African American heritage through classical music. His style explored new possibilities in art music composition, when modernism and the avant-garde seemed to be the only acceptable avenues.

Still's route to becoming a composer is as varied and wide-ranging as the genres he composed in. He worked as a big band arranger and a musician in a pit band. He was a Hollywood composer and a composer of opera. He was a modernist and he was a "Harlem Renaissance Man." First and foremost Still was a composer. The varied genres and venues in which he worked fueled his ability and talent. His background and the professional choices he made kept him from being pigeon-holed into the popular genre which he was strove so hard to avoid.

Still performed, composed, and arranged in multiple styles and genres, many times just to survive. This eclecticism molded him as a musician and defined him as a composer. From pit bands in New York to the opera stage, Still maintained his determination and drive to develop and explore his talent. He never lost sight of this goal and it is this which truly defines him and his music.

Bibliography

Anderson, Paul Allen. *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.

Arvey, Verna. *In One lifetime.* Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1984.

_____. *William Grant Still,* with introduction by John Tasker Howard. New York: J. Fischer, 1939.

_____. "George Gershwin Through the Eyes of a Friend." *Opera and Concert*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Apr 1948): 10-11, 27-28.

_____. "Afro American Music Memo." *Music Journal,* Vol. 27, No. 9 (Nov. 1969): 36, 68-69.

Carman, Judith E.,William K. Gaeddert, and Rita M. Resch. *Art Song in the United States, 1759-1999: An Annotated Bibliography*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001.

Charters, Samuel Barclay. *A Language of Song: Journeys in the Musical World of the African Diaspora.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009.

Colbert, Soyica Diggs. *The African American Theatrical Body: Reception, Performance, and the Stage.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Crawford, Richard. *America's Musical Life: A History*. London: W.W. Norton, 2005.

Edwards, Benjamin Griffith. "The Life of William Grant Still." Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1987.

De Lerma, Dominique-René. *William Grant Still: A Register of His Works: A Tribute on the Centenary of his Birth*. Flagstaff: William Grant Still Music, c1995.

Dje Dje, Jacqueline Cogdell. "Context and Creativity: William Grant Still in Los Angeles." *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring, 2011): 1-27.

Floyd Jr., Samuel. *International Dictionary of Black Composers.* Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1999.

_____. *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays.* New York: Greenwood Press, 1990.

Grant Still Music. "Grief." Works for Voice(s) and Piano OR Voice(s) and Ensemble. Accessed December 4, 2019. http://www.williamgrantstillmusic.com/WorksforVoiceorVoicesandPiano.htm#Grief.

Grove Dictionary of Music online, George Whitefield Chadwick, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.indiana.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/05356?q=george+whitefield+CHadwick&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit, Accessed 4/22/2014.

Handy, W.C.. *The Father of the Blues: An Autobiography.* New York: Macmillan, 1941.

_____ & Eileen Southern. "Letter from W. C. Handy to William Grant Still." *The Black Perspective in Music*, Vol., No. 2 (Autumn, 1979): 199-234.

Herbert, Eugenia. "Art or arts?" *African Arts,* Vol. 29, No. 1. (Winter, 1996): 1, 8, 10-11.

Hill, Laban Carrick. *Harlem Stomp!: A Cultural History of the Harlem Renaissance.* New York: Little Brown, 2003.

Hogan, Moses. *The Oxford Book of Spirituals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, c2002.

Holmes, Eugene C. "Alain Locke and the New Negro Movement." *Negro American Literature Forum,* Vol. 2, No. 3, Protest and Propaganda Literature (Autumn, 1968): 60-68.

Hudgins, Mary. "An outstanding Arkansas composer." *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* (1966): 308-314.

King, Mike. "Concerning the Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art and Science." *Leonardo*, Vol. 31, No. 1. (1998): 21-31.

Library of Congress Blog. "Copyright Deposit Sets Record Straight on Noted 20th-Century Song." April 11, 2014. Accessed December 4, 2019. https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2014/04/copyright-deposit-sets-record--straight-on-noted-20th-century-song/.

Locke, Alain L. *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke: A Selection of Essays.* Edited by Jeffry C.
Stewart. New York: Garland, 1984.

Moe, Orin. "William Grant Still: The Songs of Separation." *Black Music Research Journal,* Vol.1 (1980): 18-36.

_____. "Black Music and Music Analysis William Grant Still's *Songs of Separation* as a Point of Departure." *Black Music Research Journal,* Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring, 1990): 89-90.

Murchison, Gayle Minetta. "'Dean of Afro-American Composers' or 'Harlem Renaissance Man': 'The New Negro' and the Musical Poetics of William Grant Still." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly,* Vol. 53, No. 1 (Spring, 1994): 42-74.

_____*Nationalism and William Grant Still and Aaron Copland Between the wars: Style and Ideology.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.

_____. "Current Research Twelve Years After the William Grant Still Centennial," *Black Music Research Journal* 25, no. ½ (Spring-Fall, 2005): 119-154.

_____. "Dean of the Afro-American Composers or Harlem Renaissance Man: The New Negro and the Musical Poetics of William Grant Still", *The Arkansas Quarterly*, Vol. 53, NO. 1 (Spring, 1994), p. 73.

Nicholls, David. *The Cambridge History of American Music.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Oja, Carol J., "'New Music' and the 'New Negro': The Background of William Grant Still's *Afro-American Symphony,*" *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 22, Supplement: Best of BMRJ (2002): 107-130.

Patterson, Willis. "The African American Art Song: A musical means for special Teaching and learning." *Black Music Research Journal,* Vol. 16, No. 2 (Autumn, 1996): 303-310.

Perlis, Vivian. *Composer's Voices From Ives to Ellington: An Oral History of American Music.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

Reef, Catherine. *William Grant Still: African American Composer.* Greensboro, NC: Masters of Music, 2003.

Robertson, David. *W.C. Handy: The Life and Times of the Man Who Made the Blues.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

Smith, Catherine Parsons. *William Grant Still.* Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

_____. *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions.* Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000.

_____. "William Grant Still in Ohio (1911-1919)." *American Music*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Summer, 2004): 203-230.

Southern, Eileen. "A Birthday Offering to William Grant Still." *The Black Perpective in Music,* Vol.3, No. 2 (May, 1975): 165-176.

Soll, Beverly. *I* D*ream a World: The Operas of William Grant Still.* Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2005.

Spencer, Jon Michael. *The New Negroes and Their Music: The Success of the Harlem Renaissance.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997.

_____. "William Grant Still, 'Lennox Ave' 1937," *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry*, Vol. 2, (1996): pp. ii-vi

Still, Judith Anne. *Little David Had no Fear.* Flagstaff, Ariz.: Master-Player Library, 1999.

_____. *William Grant Still and the Fusion of Cultures in American Music.* Flagstaff, Ariz.: Master-Player Library, 1995.

_____ . *William Grant Still: A Voice High-Sounding*. Flagstaff: Master-Player Library, 2003.

_____ , Michael J. Dabrishus, and Carolyn L. Quin. *William Grant Still: A Bio-Bibliography.* Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996.

Still, William Grant. *An Art Song Collection.* Flagstaff, AZ: The Master-Player Library, 2000.

_____. *Fifty Years of Progress in Music*. Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh Courier, 1950.

_____. *From the Hearts of Women: A Song Cycle.* Flagstaff, Ariz.: William Grant Still Music, 2004.

_____. "Grief".

_____. *My Arkansas Boyhood.* Van Buren, Ark.: Press Argus Printers, 1967.

_____. *Songs of Separation.* New York: Leeds Music Corporation, c1949.

_____. *The William Grant Still Reader: Essays on American Music.* Edited by Jon Michael Spencer. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992.

_____ . *William Grant Still: An Oral History*. Flagstaff, AZ: Master-Player Library, c1998.

Still, William Grant, and Le Roy V Brant. *Grief.* High voice. Bryn Mawr, Pa.: Oliver Ditson, 1955.

Tracy, Steven C. *Langston Hughes and the Blues.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

Varèse, Edgard. "Un Grand Sommeil Noir". Paris: Editions Salabert, 1973.

Walters, Richard., Ernst Bacon, Amy Beach, John Alden Carpenter, Ernest Charles, John Duke, Charles Tomlinson Griffes, et al. *Romantic American Art Songs: 50 Songs by 14 Composers, for High Voice and Piano.* New York, NY: G. Schirmer, 1990.

Williams, Alwyn. "Jazz and the New Negro: Harlem's Intellectuals Wrestle With the Art of the Age." *Australasian Journal of American Studies,* Vol. 21, No. 1 (July 20002): 1-18.

Wyatt, Robert and John Andrew Johnson Edit. *The George Gershwin Reader.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.